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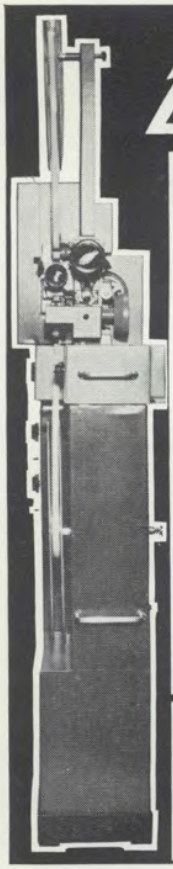

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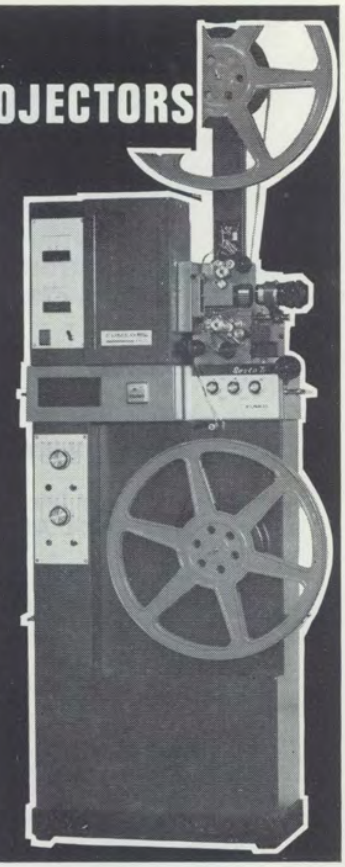

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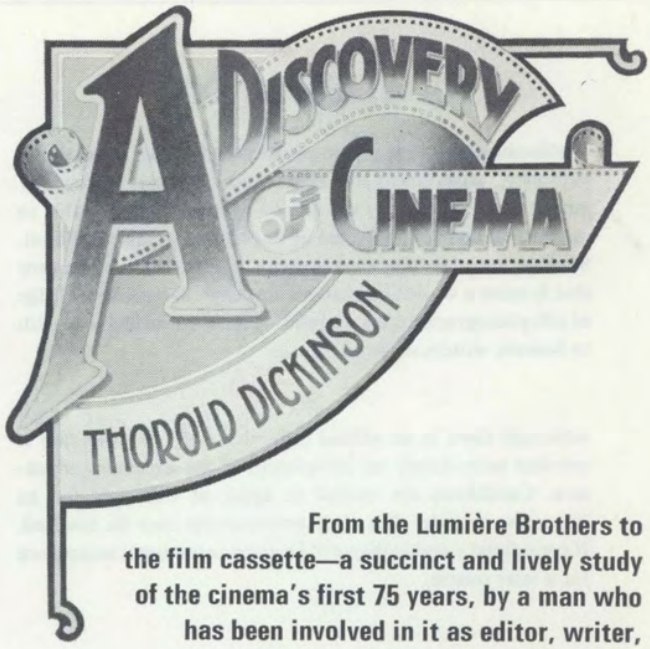

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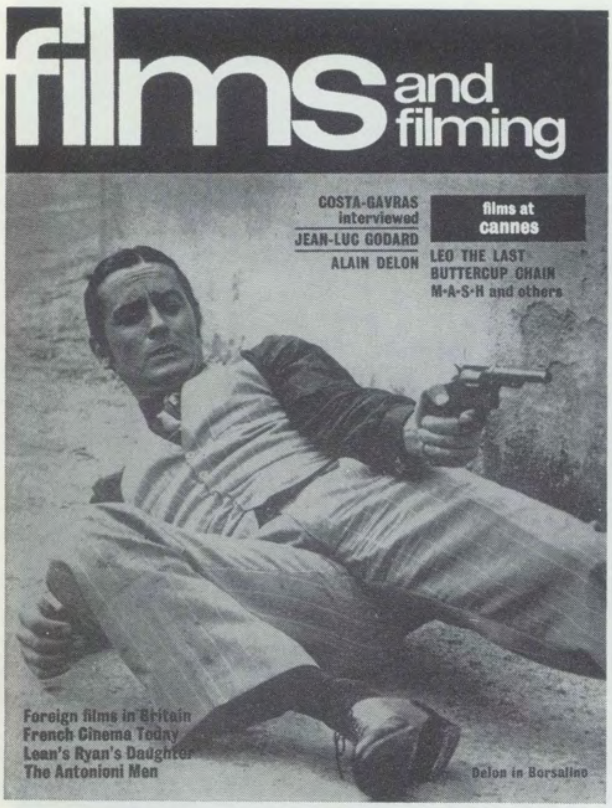

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International Film Quarterly

Summer 1971

Volume 40 No. 3.

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On the cover: Margaret Leighton and Julie Christie watching the village cricket match in Losey's 'The Go-Between'.

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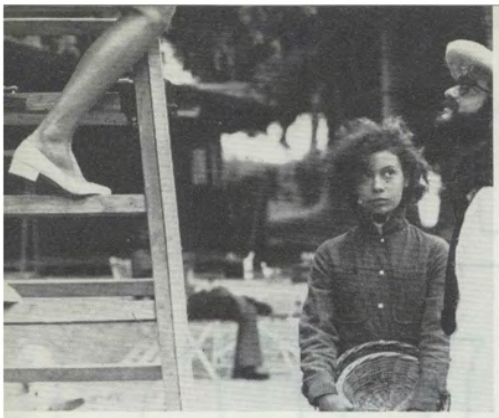


Eric Rohmer: Choice and Chance

Rohmer interviewed by Rui Nogueira

ERIC ROHMER: Unlike my colleagues on *Cahiers du Cinéma*, I came rather late to films. Until I was sixteen I hadn't seen a thing. It was only after the war that I really became interested, when I started going to the Cinémathèque, which in those days was called 'Le Cercle du Cinéma', and then it was the silent films that attracted me most. Murnau was the great revelation. In those days he wasn't so highly thought of. Even Bazin considered his work dated—though of course he didn't feel that about Stroheim. I suppose *Nosferatu* was the only Murnau film that was really appreciated (and of course *Tabu*, although that was because everyone credited it to Flaherty). So *Sunrise*, *Faust*, *Tartuffe*, *The Last Laugh* really were revelations. I wrote somewhere that Murnau was the greatest of all film-makers, the one with the richest imagination. And I still think so.

Your first feature film, *Le Signe du Lion*, was something of a commercial failure. Do you feel that you now know the reasons?

The critics spoke highly of the film, but not in a way that made people want to see it, whereas they did make people want to see *La Collectionneuse*, *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* and *Le Genou de Claire*. And *Le Signe du Lion* never found its proper audience. Nowadays films like mine have a following, a select public that knows what kind of film it is being offered. There must be a process of selection, of segregation (and I don't care if that's a pejorative word!). There are different publics for different types of painting, music, books. So why do people still think that in cinema there is only the one big general public? The mass audience enjoys television, variety, adventure. Rightly so; it's foolish to try to force on it what it doesn't want. But films like mine appeal to people with a certain filmic or literary background; an audience, I now realise, which is actually much larger than I once supposed. Of course there are films much more difficult than mine which still haven't managed to find their audience, outside the Cinémathèque.

You have done some TV work. What do you feel about television?

I have directed a couple of programmes for French television in the series *Cinéastes de Notre Temps*. That was an extension of my work as a critic; it certainly wasn't film-making. With Educational Television it was different: I've made some documentary shorts for them which were real films and which I like a lot. Or, rather, I like them as much as the work I have done elsewhere. I also work occasionally simply as a 'director', in collaboration with an educationist, but those are just bread-and-butter jobs. Television does teach you to produce 'readable' images. Though, oddly enough, I have noticed that films made for public cinemas are often actually more 'readable' than material filmed directly for television, in spite of the inevitable losses. When you show a film on TV, the framing goes to pieces, straight lines are warped, the decor no longer looks solid and three-dimensional. As for the feeling of 'immediate time', which is central to a film like *La Collectionneuse*, that goes completely.

Take a film like *La Carrière de Suzanne*, which depends on the problem of deciding whether a girl is pretty or plain. On the average television set, the picture quality is so poor that you couldn't tell anyway. A person's charm comes across on television almost exclusively in close-up; and even then it is often helped by the voice, which *does* come across well. But the way people stand and walk and move, the whole physical dimension . . . all that is lost. Personally, I don't take the view that television is an intimate medium. It's a mini-spectacle, perhaps, but it's still a spectacle. It's really closer to theatre than cinema, because when you watch television you are not sitting in total darkness, isolated from the world outside; you're in front of the screen, but you're not *inside* it. Whereas cinema, as I see it, is a continual and continuous involvement.

Before talking about your films, would you mind answering a question you must have been asked dozens of times: how did the idea of the *contes moraux* occur to you?

I can try. Partly because I wanted to follow the same idea through several films; partly because I thought audiences and producers would be more likely to accept my idea in this form than in another. Instead of asking myself what subjects were most likely to appeal to audiences, I persuaded myself that the best thing would be to treat the same subject six times over. In the hope that by the sixth time the audience would come to me! I am still carrying out the programme I mapped out for myself ten years ago. I was determined to be inflexible and intractable, because if you persist in an idea it seems to me that in the end you do secure a following. Even with a distributor . . . it's much more difficult for him to put up arguments and criticisms about a scenario which is part of a group of six than about an isolated script. No one, for instance, is going to ask me to work a bit of a crime story into *Le Genou de Claire*, because it's the fifth of the *contes moraux* and the *contes moraux* aren't detective stories. So really my aim was to persuade people to accept this style of cinema—which is not new, for in films as in novels nothing is ever really new.

What I call a *conte moral* is not a tale with a moral, but a story which deals less with what people do than with what is going on in their minds while they are doing it. A cinema of thoughts rather than actions. The people in my films are not expressing abstract ideas—there is no 'ideology' in them, or very little—but revealing what they think about relationships between men and women, about friendship, love, desire, their conception of life, happiness (perhaps in my next film I'll talk more about happiness . . .), boredom, work, leisure . . . Things which have of course been spoken about previously in the cinema, but usually indirectly, in the context of a dramatic plot. Whereas in the *contes moraux* this just doesn't exist, and in particular there's no clear-cut line of tragedy or comedy. You can say that my work is closer to the novel—to a certain classic style of novel which the cinema is now taking over—than to other forms of entertainment, like the theatre. And that, for me, is significant. I think I have contributed towards leading the cinema even further away from the theatre than it had already gone. My characters may do a lot of talking, but it takes more than dialogue to make a play. They don't talk at all like people in a play—at least, I hope they don't.

Why did you number the *contes moraux*?

Because once you have decided on a collection of stories, it's best that it should end somewhere. I don't want to become 'the moral stories man' in the sense that Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, is 'the extraordinary stories man'. I can make—and one day if I want to I shall make—fantasies, thrillers, historical novels. The *contes moraux* are a phase, while at the same time I see them as variations on a given theme. In *Le Genou de Claire*, as in the earlier films, the story is about a man meeting a woman at the very moment when he is about to commit himself to someone else. In *Claire*, this woman is double—or even triple, if you regard Aurora as more than just a confidante. The man is fully aware that this meeting isn't going to disrupt his life: there is nothing dramatic about it, no moment of decision. What is in question is his way of thinking, his way of looking at life, rather than his course of action. In my previous film, the encounter with Maud enriches the engineer morally; in *Le Genou de Claire*, the man's meeting with the two young girls will perhaps add something to his ideas before he marries Lucinda, whether it serves to confirm his opinions or undermines them.

One might almost say that this encounter enables the man to draw up a sort of introspective balance-sheet . . .?

Yes, for him it amounts to a kind of halt, a respite, a breathing-space, a parenthesis in his life, a moment for taking stock. What interests me are the thoughts that fill his mind at that particular moment. And I wanted to use the cinema to show them, even though as the art of objective and exterior images, it might seem the least appropriate.

Although he is resolute about his decision, Trintignant in *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* can't stop himself proposing to Maud . . .

But he does it whimsically: it isn't serious. Which doesn't alter the fact that everything always remains in question, even after the decision has been made.

Could we go back to *La Collectionneuse*? It was a daring venture, because I believe you had no distribution guarantee. Where did you get the money from?

Nowhere. We hadn't any money, or only a very little. There was the cash from the sale to television of my two previous *contes*

moraux; and that was just enough to pay for the film stock, rent a house in St. Tropez (in June, when it's reasonably cheap), and hire a cook. . . The actors and technicians agreed to work without salaries, on a profit-sharing basis. I made it a rule that I would only have one take for each shot, and I used less than 17,000 feet of film. That kind of hard discipline has its advantages: once the actors are used to it, they can actually be more relaxed and more consistent in their performances. It's much easier to achieve perfection in a single bound than step by step. It's like the high jump: there's no point in trying more than once. With some directors, actors must not be allowed any independence; and that kind of director has to do a number of takes to get the effect which corresponds to his own intentions. But if you think, as I do, that the actor's spontaneity should be expressed in each take, then it's in your best interests to shoot as little as possible.

But didn't you rehearse before every take in *La Collectionneuse*?

Of course I did. I couldn't have done without rehearsals, particularly as the film was very carefully planned and in no way improvised. I wrote the dialogue myself with the actors, sometimes only the evening or the morning before we shot the scene. But the fact remains that the dialogue was *written*.

You used a rather different method of working with the actors and dialogue in *Maud*, and then in *Le Genou de Claire* reverted to the technique of *La Collectionneuse* . . .

Yes, on *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* I had written the whole script myself two years before the film was made—except for Antoine Vitez' 'Marxist' speech which we worked out together. And in *Claire*, Brialy's part was scripted from start to finish, with only two exceptions. For the two girls, about half of their dialogue was scripted and the rest was worked out much later, through discussions and conversations. This is particularly evident in the dialogue of Béatrice Romand (Laura), where you can sense the improvisation.

Claire is really a mixture of everything: scenes I wrote earlier, and scenes which I worked out with the actors, sometimes weeks and sometimes only a day or two before shooting. We would get together and talk around a cassette recorder, and I could see what was natural and what was less so and make a choice. There are even some wholly improvised scenes in which Brialy made up his own lines—for the first time in his career, I believe. Of course I told him what to talk about, but the actual words are not mine. For instance, the scene of the quarrel with the lifeguard at the camp site: I was very anxious that this should retain an authentic, slightly incoherent quality which a written script would have eliminated. As it was, there was some tension while the scene was being shot. Afterwards everyone dived into the water; with some pleasure, I might add. We shot one take and it was the right one.

What struck me most, in terms of the performances in *Le Genou de Claire*, was the subtlety of the actors' inflections. It appears to be very conscious, and yet the result sounds wholly natural.

I did encourage this type of voice modulation, the use of different inflections . . . you couldn't say I ordered or imposed it, but I helped it along. And that is one of the advantages of using actors who have not been spoiled by professionalism. Aurora's voice, for instance, has a tendency towards harshness which she herself thought was excessive. Instead of checking her, I would compliment her every time she said that she was scared of her own voice . . . I really like it a lot. It's the musical side of my films; because, as you know, I never use music itself. The only music in my films is the music of people's voices.

You know, I find this idea of 'directing' actors somewhat contentious—it's a dangerous idea to practise or at least a delicate one, especially in contemporary cinema. In Chaplin's *The Countess from Hong Kong* the actors are 'directed' to an extraordinary degree; but I don't think that a young filmmaker could or should do as much. Chaplin is capable of repeating the same take literally dozens of times. I very seldom do more than one take, and when I do repeat a take it is rarely because of the actors. This implies a conception of 'acting' that is entirely different from Chaplin's, though he was right in his time and is still right for himself . . . And, you know, *The Countess from Hong Kong* is an extremely modern film: it's a source of ideas, it really does offer something new, whereas all that these so-called 'new' films offer me is a hotchpotch of half-assimilated influences.

Do you supervise the framing and editing on your films?

I do indeed: I keep a close watch on everything. The editing is always a key element, and on *La Collectionneuse* I did my own cutting, only bringing in the editor for the sound. When I shoot with direct sound I don't actually handle the film myself, but I'm never out of the cutting-room. Framing, too, is vitally important. I always have a look through the view-finder, and if I leave Nestor Almendros considerable initiative it is because after several years of working together we see things in the same way. Besides, he has a visual culture, a highly developed pictorial sense, and that is extremely rare in France.

Do you think that *La Collectionneuse* was one of the first observations of the times we live in . . . of young people, that is, in that kind of setting?

Inevitably it was. Every film is a witness to its own time, the moment it shows things as they are. In the cinema nothing is easier than to show what is: you only have to look around you. I really admire people who manage to show what is *not*, or what no longer is . . . There's achievement for you! Yet you still occasionally see, and in France especially, films of a truly staggering unreality . . . When I say that the cinema is adept at showing what is, I mean what is in life: not what's in the magazine articles or on television screens. It's the medium for raw reality, not predigested by the press or the opinion polls or the popular myths. The cinema's role, precisely, is to create the myths, as it did in Chaplin's time, not to find all its sources of inspiration outside itself. Film, for instance, used to provide the themes for strip cartoons; now it's the other way round.

What struck me particularly in *La Collectionneuse* was your care for a particular kind of detail: the books the characters are reading, for instance, the complete works of Rousseau and the book on German Romanticism . . .

I wanted my character to be reading some monument of world literature, the sort of big book one takes away with one on holiday. Patrick Bauchau (Adrien) felt like re-reading Rousseau, though he says the book could just as well have been *Don Quixote*. As for *Romantisme Allemand*: that was a book belonging to Daniel Pommereulle which Haydée flipped through and then put aside, just as she does on the screen. I was very concerned about the authenticity of the Pommereulle character: I didn't want the painter to be played by anyone except a painter. And I chose that paint-tin with the razor blades from among his works because he was fond of it and talked about it. It's possible to see the tin as having symbolic meaning in the film; but although I wouldn't disagree, it's a meaning which derives from the character himself and not from me.

You also had the Marxist in *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* played by an actual Marxist (Antoine Vitez), and the novelist in *Le Genou de Claire* played by a novelist (Aurora Cornu).

Yes, a thinker or a writer or an artist cannot be interpreted by anyone else. The same is true of a workman, so far as his work is concerned.

Can one identify the characters in *La Collectionneuse* with the actors?

No. They have nothing in common except their style: the way they talk or the way they look. I didn't want to make a psychodrama but a work of pure fiction, with the conscious collaboration of the cast. I never tried to film them unawares, but asked them to give the best part of themselves.

Still on *La Collectionneuse*, one notices that in the 'voice off' passages Adrien is using a very formal, eighteenth-century manner, whereas the dialogue is always very modern in style. Did you intend to suggest the dichotomy between thought and speech, or was there another reason?

I don't find Adrien's commentary at all 'eighteenth-century', though of course the style is 'literary'. Let's say that these are extracts from a journal, written in the style such a man would probably use, however slangy he may be in conversation. Anyhow, it's a dandified slang . . . But the dichotomy is certainly intentional: rightly or wrongly, I wanted that difference in tone.

But there's no such difference with Trintignant, the narrator of *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*: his diary notes correspond exactly with the way he speaks.

But here it's no longer a question of a private diary; merely a couple of observations which he's making to himself, and which I wanted expressed as briefly and as neutrally as possible.

How did you choose the actors for *Le Genou de Claire*?

I have known Jean-Claude Brialy for a long time, and I chose him for this part because I've always felt that he was a very good actor who had got trapped in a series of parts well below his potential: he has a sharp and subtle mind, and he is always

playing hare-brained, rather childish young men. His beard was also a help, because it aged him just that little bit more and gave him the maturity I wanted.

As for the others . . . Aurora, the novelist, has been a friend of mine for several years; I met her in Paris and as soon as I saw her I had the idea of giving her a part . . . this part. Béatrice was unearthed, with some difficulty I might say, by some photographer friends who spread the word that I was preparing a film. She was doing modelling work for teenage fashion magazines. And Laurence (Claire) was a schoolgirl.

Béatrice Romand, the girl who plays Laura, is really amazing. A star is born . . .

That's what everyone tells me, and that's what I thought when I chose her. There is something about her . . . you don't meet girls like her every day, maybe once every five or ten years. I don't know how the character would have worked out if I hadn't found her: I know Laura would have been less interesting. I developed the character for her. And I'm sure she can play very different types of role from the one I gave her here: she is more conventionally beautiful in real life than she looks in the film, because I had to make her seem a little younger. I see her perhaps as a Dostoievsky or a Chekhov heroine—very touching. But she can play anything, and whatever she does she will bring an extraordinary power to it.

And for *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*?

There the actors were all professionals, and they identified miraculously with their characters. It was the more remarkable because, as I've said, the script was written long before the film was cast.

People tend to discuss the women in your films rather than the men. Perhaps it's because the women always seem to be pulling the strings; the men in your films are often dupes . . .

The central character in my films tends, first and foremost, to be complacent about himself. You could say that he's constantly being taken in by his own philosophy, his self-justification. My own view of him is rather critical. His complacency is always attacked by the other characters. My female characters are not necessarily more sympathetic, but they are more clear-minded. You should never think of me as the apologist for my male character, even (or especially) when he is being his own apologist. On the contrary; the men in my films are not meant to be particularly sympathetic characters.

Does Claire represent for Jérôme a possibility that he has lost?

If you like, she stands for an attraction that is purely erotic, in the most refined sense of the word. Jérôme has a Proustian side to him: not a libertine, but an '*amateur*'. He's fascinated by a single part of her body. He dreams of a woman who has a special kind of lightness and slightness and fragility. But this is exactly the kind of woman who is not for him. You have the impression—as far as you can tell from Lucinda's photograph—that he'd get on much better with a woman of more force and personality. Yet his desire drives him towards a girl who, physically as well as morally, is somehow at once more fragile and more unassuming. It's a common enough thing in men: the

'Le Genou de Claire': Aurora Cornu, Jean-Claude Brialy

contradiction—even within desire itself—between what is purely desired and only desired, and what is possessed. The object of desire is not necessarily the object of possession. That's what I was interested in showing.

Proust, of course, described it admirably: it's a twentieth-century rather than an eighteenth-century preoccupation. And even with our present rampant eroticism, one wonders whether the ordinary man really would be satisfied if he could possess the women he sees in the magazines. I think there is a type of woman who is made to be looked at and another type who is made to . . . be touched. All the senses cannot be satisfied by the same object; and the contradiction is clearer today than ever before, since visual eroticism has become so general. At any rate, that's the case with Jérôme: from the woman who, to his sense of sight, appears the most desirable, he wants nothing, or only something extremely symbolic. Ultimately, touching her knee is simply a way of being able to say 'I touched it', like children when they're playing tag . . . Possession for him adds nothing to desire. On the contrary, his desire feeds on the absence of possession. That's what satisfies him. It's not an unusual state, and there's nothing morbid about it.

On top of that, I think Jérôme simply wants to dazzle the novelist, to do something that will make people talk about him. And he does say to her: 'It's no longer you who are shaping the novel, it's me.' But I don't know . . . I can't really answer questions like this, because, in so far as the central character asks himself the same sort of questions, the audience can do likewise. In my films, there are things you hear and things you see, and the rest is supposition.

When Jérôme justifies his gesture by talking about the good deed he has done, is

'Le Genou de Claire': Jean-Claude Brialy, Béatrice Romand

that just a case of the libertine's moral camouflage?

Absolutely not. Jérôme is in no sense a libertine, even if what he did was rather unpleasant: it was extremely hateful of him to make the girl cry for no good reason. But his motive was that he deeply and sincerely despised the other boy. The characters in my *contes moraux* are never cynics. They always find justifications for their actions, as people in real life always do . . . Of course, they can be wrong . . . they may often give false reasons, but at least they always have reasons. And they have them sincerely. At the end of the film, when the novelist sees the reconciliation between the boy and girl after Jérôme has left, she laughs quietly to herself because she realises that he was mistaken. He's more naive than blasé. At least that is my interpretation, but it isn't necessarily the right one . . .

The fact that the boy comes to see Claire the day after and tells her the complete truth not only destroys the whole story Jérôme had imagined, but makes his gesture useless . . .

Yes, but the boy too could be lying. There is nothing to prove that what he tells her is the exact truth. His explanations seem very embarrassed and you get the impression that he's not entirely innocent. Definitely not. So that Claire is right to hold it against him. So the story really has no ending . . . In all these *contes moraux* it is a mistake to define feelings too precisely—they are always a little cloudy and ambiguous. When you find an explanation—and you always can—there is always another explanation behind the first one. I never really manage to finish my stories, since the endings I find all have multiple repercussions. Like an echo. You might say that the end is a way of going back over the story. As in *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*: a ball bounces on the ground and turns the story around so that we see it in a different light. *La Collectionneuse* was a little like that as well. At the end, Haydée leaves Adrien on the road, and that forces us to reconsider everything, right from the beginning. It's a device which I've used in all my *contes moraux*, but it is also an essential part of the theme, or the chemical ingredients which go to make up the theme: this way of ending on an echo.

***Claire* is presented in the form of a diary. Why?**

One can suppose that it corresponds to the notes taken by the novelist. The dates, written on the pink paper, are in her handwriting.

The kiss on the hilltop: why did you set this particular scene in the midst of the mountains?

On this film, I didn't look for locations to fit a story I had written; I found the places first and it was only afterwards that I wrote the film. The settings gave me an idea of which I only became fully conscious at the editing stage. I noticed that my whole *mise en scène* was structured along one dominant line: a diagonal running from the surface of the lake to the mountain-tops. It's along this diagonal that Laura is looking when she gazes up at Jérôme; and along which his arm travels as it approaches Claire's knee. In the scene you mention, it's very sharply defined: all the movements converge on the circle of the mountains. I've also noticed that I tend to set my love scenes in what could be described as natural amphitheatres: the cove in *La Collectionneuse*, the snowy hills lowering over the town in *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*.

Perhaps there is a symbol there. I avoid symbols on principle, but this one imposed itself on me anyway. The symbolism was really willed by Laura, who had said the day before (and the phrase came from the actress herself, because I was letting her improvise in that scene), 'The mountain is protecting us.' The relationship between the Laura-Jérôme couple and the mountain is a sort of symbolic echo of the one between the adolescent girl and the mature man. She leans on him, leans back on him, rather as they both lean against the mountain. So that the circle of mountains does in fact turn out to be the ideal frame, the ideal receptacle for this scene; and even if there isn't a specific symbol, there's still a surprising similarity of forms. What matters to me is that my characters should develop within the settings on which they can leave the clearest mark. But, as I said, the particular relationship here was one that only struck me when I was watching the film on a viewer. I chose that particular countryside, quite simply, because I had discovered it during my wanderings and was fascinated by its beauty.

Like the role of water in your films: ambiguous and free-flowing . . .

Yes, water too, I'll agree with that . . . water is the first element . . . the idea of tears and of rain. . . And there's also perhaps a childhood memory involved, one of my earliest memories, of a little girl crying in a barn or under a shed while it was raining outside, and her sister comforting her. I suppose that I had always envisaged the scene where he caresses her knee as happening in the rain. That was my first idea. The lake came later, it was slightly superfluous, but since I'm very fond of water there is a lot of it in my films; I like water to look at, and to touch. There's water in *Le Genou de Claire*, in *La Collectionneuse*, in *Le Signe du Lion*. In *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* there is snow instead. And—yes, you're quite right—there is the sea at the end of the film.

I am not very fond of the arid Mediterranean landscape, the setting of *La Collectionneuse*. The country I like best is the temperate zone, in central France. I wanted to have trees in the film. And then the cherry trees, the fruit and flowers—they're all things I find enormously pleasing. There are very few manufactured objects in my films; there's furniture, of course, but you won't find any fetishism about clothes or objects. At least, I don't think you will. Yesterday I saw Stroheim's *Merry Widow* again—a marvellous film, by the way. I hadn't seen it for a long time, and I was struck by the sheer frenzy of the costumes and sets. Personally, I don't belong to the baroque family, the Stroheims and Sternbergs, who attach such extreme importance to artificial things. I don't like artifice; I prefer nature.

But the framework is very significant, since I can't imagine your characters in settings other than those you've chosen for them. You never separate your characters from the setting . . .

That's exactly right. And Nestor Almendros' camerawork does a great deal to relate characters to a landscape. They are bathed in light. It is a type of camerawork that has more to do with the modelling of figures than with outline. And I like painters who really use light, who drown their subjects in light rather than isolating one object from another. I dislike, for instance, that surrealist trick of detaching the object, enclosing it, making a sort of entity out of it. The painters I prefer are Rembrandt or Turner or Cézanne.

Le Genou de Claire by Carlos Clarens

'These comparisons are pleasant and diverting, and who would not willingly play with resemblances? But human beings exist on a much higher plane than these substances, and having been too prodigal with such fine words as choice and elective affinity, they should collect themselves and seriously ponder the worth of such terms. I know of many unfortunate cases where the intimate union of two beings, seemingly indissoluble, was destroyed by the chance addition of a third, and one of the two elements exiled into space, free of his bonds, devoid of limits.'—GOETHE, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Ch. IV.

Among his contemporaries, and no doubt because of his past career as a critic, Eric Rohmer has the unique knack of providing reviewers and students of his work with the reassuring guidelines of literary reference, promptly and predictably seized upon. The clues are sometimes planted subliminally, sometimes obviously proffered by Rohmer himself, in interview, or through one or several of his (often contradictory) mouthpieces. Thus, it was Laclos for *La Collectionneuse*, a film that nevertheless concerned itself less with erotic intrigue than with the emotional impasse of dandyism; Pascal for the wintry spiritual retreat of *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*; and now Proust for *Le Genou de Claire*, which may very well be Rohmer's watershed movie, the one that will bring to mind a few unexpected references, more illuminating if perhaps not as readily avowed as *A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleur*. Structure, according to linguistics, has reasons that realism knows little of.

Like *La Collectionneuse*, *Le Genou de Claire* is a summer film in colour, a laic film if you wish, whose only overt timeliness, apart from Claire's bikini and Jerome's motorboat, is the lack of heavy religious, or metaphysical, preoccupations. Every event in the film is very precisely dated, yet the well-known Rohmer *vase clos* remains impervious to change in politics or fashion;

an isolation dating (at least) from Rohmer's one novel, *Elizabeth*, written under the pseudonym of Gilbert Cordier during the German Occupation, a mass of seemingly banal dialogue intercut with flat impersonal description, which records the almost tidal couplings and partings of several young people at a seaside resort. *Claire* itself is a distillation of *La Roseraie*, a film idea co-authored by Rohmer and Paul Gégauff, published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951, complete with *photo-roman* illustrations that already foreshadow the visual style of the Moral Tales. The melodramatic touches in the scenario, like the suicide of the Claire-like heroine, seem to be all Gégauff's and have totally vanished. Otherwise, narration and characters have an unmistakable Rohmerian stamp and have not substantially changed in the intervening twenty years.

On the eve of his marriage, Jerome returns to Annecy to sell the lakeside villa of his childhood holidays. He meets Aurora, writer and old flame, who proposes that Jerome lend himself as the subject of her next novel, to be developed in the ensuing weeks, and which will deal mostly with Jerome's more-or-less romantic involvements with the local ladies: Madame Wagner, a widow and a divorcée whose sentimental fires, Rohmer charmingly hints, are far from banked; and her two teenage daughters, Laura and Claire. Jerome becomes amusingly and chastely involved with Laura, a child-woman and his precocious soulmate. He also develops a certain animosity, amply repaid with indifference, towards the beautiful Claire, the living image of golden, indifferent, non-verbal youth. He centres his desire on her knee, resolves to place his hand on it, but only when armed with a moral alibi. His chance comes when he spies Claire's fiancé, Gilles, with another girl. He reports the incident to Claire who, understandably hurt, starts to cry. Laying a consoling hand on Claire's knee then becomes less the fulfilment of his desire than Jerome's good deed for the day. He leaves the next day, smugly satisfied at having broken up a misalliance as well as having provided Aurora with her story. His victory is not merely petty but short-lived. Claire and Gilles are soon reconciled, and one of Rohmer's neat little twists leaves us to debate whether he was in fact unfaithful.

From the above, it's obvious that *Claire* is another storm in the Rohmer teacup. AURORA: 'I never felt like using you as a character.' JEROME: 'Am I too dull?' AURORA: 'But one *can* write a good story with insignificant characters.' Under cover of banality, Rohmer deepens his subtleties, splits his archetypes or keeps them off-stage, allows secondary readings to come to the surface. Thus, Jerome's mistress and wife-to-be remains but a name and a photograph; Claire and Laura, Aurora and Madame Wagner become reflections, young and old, of the Other Woman, less the *occasion de péché* that Maud was than so many sentimental snares in the path of choice.

Except for Claire and her beau—from whom nothing is to be gleaned: what they say or think or feel exists merely to excite, provoke or seduce each other—Rohmer makes his people compulsive talkers; but this time the dialogue, witty and free of epigram as ever, takes on the dual function of alternately revealing and concealing the characters. Aurora does not lie, she simply withholds part of the truth; Jerome masks a certain despair while amusing himself in his duplicity. In *Maud*, where narration was limited to a couple of instances that established without doubt the sincerity of the hero's intentions, one never doubted their meanings: they were as if spoken in the confessional. But in *Claire*, the more they explain themselves to us, the more one feels they're offering a counterfeit of motives and self-deception. The narrator is not just Jerome, but Jerome as he speaks to Aurora. Entries in her journal time and codify the encounters, the parries and retreats, to be studied later with the eye of the novelist like designs in a magnetic field, or, to connect Rohmer with the German Romantics he knows so well, following the laws of chemical attraction and repulsion. Like Goethe, Rohmer knows how to instil badinage with moral sense. *Claire* may very well be his very own 'Kindred by Choice', with characters refusing to become accomplices to their passion; even to the important role played by nature in the drama, the presence of water to unite or separate the characters or establish mood, like the sudden cloudburst that forces Jerome and Claire to seek shelter in the shed, where the decisive gesture will take place.

There are other valid but less sunny readings to *Claire*. It's revealing that for the first time in a *conte moral*, Rohmer introduces a rapport of cruelty by bringing together in the same story characters from two different generations. *La Collectionneuse* and *Maud* remained within their own group, the worldly young of Saint-Tropez and Saint-Germain in one, a group of questioning adults in Clermont-Ferrand in the other, both self-contained worlds in which the characters were attracted (not always mutually) to other members within the circle. Structurally, their rapports were intimistic, *circular*. Adrien desired Haydée, Maud chased the engineer, the engineer pursued the girl with the bicycle, and so forth. *Le Genou de Claire* throws in young and adults together, setting up a *vertical* relationship between the mature (Jerome, Aurora, perhaps Madame Wagner) and the juvenile (Claire, Laura, Gilles), and the subject of the film becomes then the progressive building, and inevitable resolution, of an erotic relationship between one and the other. Or, how the conflict between maturity (reflection, experience, self-control) and immaturity (impulse, desire) is resolved through an act of base childish spite: snitching. This abridging of the gap, this redressing of an imbalance, couldn't we read it as a metaphor for mutual, inevitable corruption?

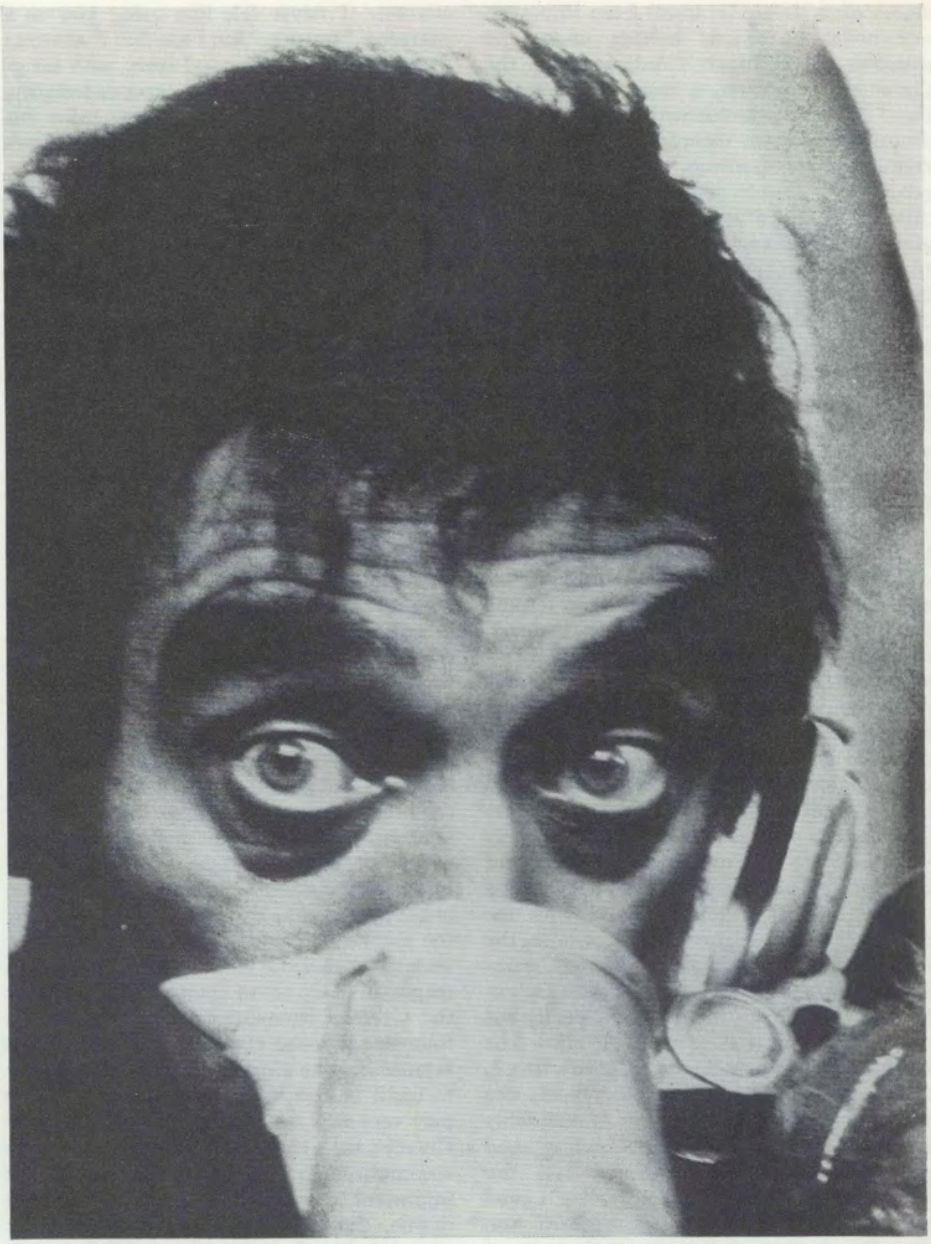
'Suddenly, Henia leaned forth to snap the thread with her teeth, as she was sewing a shirt, and this brusque gesture, this bite, caused Karol to expand, to radiate, lightening up his corner. Having put the shirt to one side, she placed her arm on the table, and this arm, presented thus in evidence, correct, modest in every way, the arm of a schoolgirl, still the property of mum and dad, appeared also naked, yes, naked, not like an arm but more like a knee . . . revealed by an opening in her dress, naked like a leg . . . and this arm, shameless, childish, excited him in a manner "stupidly youthful" (how else to call it?) as well as brutal.'

Rohmer in *La Roseraie*? No, the quotation above is taken directly from *La Pornographie*, an exercise in sensuous metaphysics by the late Polish writer and playwright Witold Gombrowicz, and whose lecture may prove indispensable to anyone seriously interested in Rohmer and/or modern Catholic writers. Like Rohmer, Gombrowicz works within a traditional mode, in his case the Polish provincial novel; and the critic François Regnault notes that the basic questions posed by his characters are two, and interchangeable: *a*) do you believe in God? *b*) why don't you go to bed with him/her? Add to this that *La Pornographie* posits a premise strikingly similar to that of *Le Genou de Claire*: two civilised middle-aged men become obsessionally involved with a young couple—adolescent, innocent peasants—and lead them into committing wanton murder, as much *un acte gratuit* as the last definitive step in a process to reduce the distance between youth and maturity.

Rohmer, the bourgeois writer (no derogatory sense intended) does not attain the extremes of a Gombrowicz: seduction, action, murder. He remains on the level of petty cruelties, small treasons; a difference in magnitude, not in substance. No modern Catholic writer has quite escaped the tortuous contradiction of those two questions. Rohmer, novelist *manqué* writing directly on film, has given us his most difficult and complex work to date. ■

SWAN SONG

Karel Pryl



Although with every day that passes it is becoming increasingly obvious that the title of this article could refer to any of the arts in Czechoslovakia—to literature, for instance—we are concerned here with the film. The image evokes a sense of sorrow, yet sorrow has no place in history. The lasting element will be something quite different —a sense of pride. And that history will record.

We need hardly dwell on the fact that before the last war the Czechoslovak cinema was practically unknown to the outside world, its existence being noted by a mere handful of the more observant critics. Entry into the international arena came after the war, and in two phases. The first coincided with the radical socio-economic changes effected in 1945 and, especially, in 1948. It was then that in the cinema, as in most other spheres, the Soviet 'model' was adopted; and this had its good and its bad points. Good points: integration with the socialist cultural sphere enabled Czechoslovak film-making to emerge from its isolation and display its wares on the screens of the socialist world. Bad points: but it so happened that those were the days when the Soviet 'model' had touched bottom in terms of hidebound dogmatism and spiritual sterility, and the degeneration of the teacher could not but have a catastrophic effect on the pupil. A black-and-white view of life, choice narrowed down to a stereotyped set of 'edifying' themes, a dry-as-dust didacticism put across with a grey uniformity of style—these, by and large, were the maladies of this 'art on the march', to use the euphemistic term applied in the 1950s to the politically manipulated output. The one consistently bright spot was the Czech puppet film, which was also well received abroad.

Karel Pryl is the pseudonym of a Czech writer living in Prague.

Above, right: Uher's 'Genius'

The second phase, which is quite a different matter, can be dated from 1962 with Jasny's *That Cat*, winner of a Special Jury Award at Cannes. But this was merely the prelude. The real advance came soon after, with the emergence of that young movement which, for want of a better name, was christened Czechoslovakia's new wave. Leaving aside the circumstances of its origin, the coming together of so much talent, so many trends and potentials, such a variety of genres and styles, and all in such a brief space of time, was a unique event in Czech film history. Moreover, there was no question—as sometimes with similar movements—of a generation gap or conflict. Youthful enthusiasm certainly played its part, but this new cinema was genuinely the fruit of a joint effort by youngsters barely out of school together with the best professionals of the middle and 'old' generations. Films of a kind never seen in this country came with a rush, like mushrooms after rain. At home audiences were wide-eyed at the frankness of the films, while abroad they caused something of a sensation. The Czechoslovak film as an art form had suddenly been discovered.

The response may be illustrated by an anecdote about the visit of the then President Novotny to the World Exhibition in Montreal. Blithely unaware that the new movement was a thorn in the flesh of his illustrious guest, Canada's Prime Minister remarked in his speech of welcome that for his knowledge of the President's country and its people he was indebted above all to its excellent films. This might have been taken as an ordinary gesture of diplomatic courtesy, had it not been for various other circumstances—the imposing array of international awards, the Czechoslovak film weeks all over the world, the sudden critical interest, the two Oscars, and the mounting demand from foreign distributors.

How to explain it all? There was more to it than a remarkable ability to assimilate the language of modern film art without losing one's own national image. A more fundamental element was the actual content of the artistic communication: its authenticity, its determination to go its own way, to say the things that needed saying, in a word, its candour. Now, for the first time, world audiences were given an insight into socialism as it really was, the view from within—not a pre-fabricated image, but a view without the ideological filter or the propaganda distortion.

True, there were paradoxes. First, although the postwar change had freed the cinema from commercial pressures and secured for it access to the socialist third of the world, it still retained much of its old-time provincial character. Then, hardly had film-making broken loose from the bonds of bureaucratic domination, hardly had it overcome its backwardness of form and paucity of ideas and managed to make a name for itself abroad, than the doors of a large part of the socialist world were found to be closed to it.

The attitudes of Western critics to the Czechoslovak film 'explosion' fall into two broad groups. Some sections of the press made the reservation that for all their critical approach and nonconformism, these films were still communist. Critics on the left, on the other hand, exclaimed: Look what freedom socialism offers its artists! Without dismissing this view as entirely illusory, it should be said that it was based more on an automatic theoretical assumption than on knowledge of the actual state of affairs. For the political situation of the day contained a contradiction which was inevitably projected into cultural policy. And in the cinema, a medium always quick to respond to the social climate, this contradiction was felt most strongly.

Following the hopes raised by the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, when Krushchev made his famous exposé of Stalin, the Czech public was disappointed both in its political expectations and in its hopes of a better life. From the standpoint of the economy the country was faced with a mounting crisis. The regime found itself on the defensive; the top-heavy bureaucracy and ubiquitous police represented power but no remedy. Threats and appeals for discipline alternated with compromise and concessions. Ultimately, under the pressure of ever more obvious failures in the economy and administration, the ideological screw began to be loosened.

On the cultural front *anti-dogmatism* was the watchword of the day. Though perhaps interpreted (and practised) variously, the very fact that the idea was tolerated was symptomatic. In time it was adopted at official level; by 1962 the Communist Party Congress was speaking of the need to provide 'scope for the arts', and four years later an entire Congress document appeared on the subject of cultural matters. But the trouble with this statement was that while obviously intended to be a grandiloquent charter for the regeneration of Czech and Slovak culture, it wavered hopelessly between the old orthodoxy and the new, more liberal attitude, offering in the end no more, indeed rather less, than had already been won. The outcome was that this document met the same fate as many others of its kind—everyone 'agreed' with it, no one did anything about it.

All this needs saying, to emphasise that the degree of freedom attained by the Czech cinema in the 1960s was not a gift from on high but a freedom that had to be fought for. What to the outside observer might seem like an 'advantage of socialism' was for the political watchdogs of this socialism an exceedingly bitter pill. Caught off guard by the spontaneous élan of the creative advance, they were powerless to contain the movement. But not for one moment did they give it the stamp of approval. On the contrary, they used all their political wiles to apply the brakes, to paralyse the renaissance. However, there was very little to show for these efforts, at any rate much less than the politicians had hoped for. They had not counted on one factor—the unprecedented solidarity displayed on the cultural front.

The first film over which film-makers and critics came into conflict with the official attitude was Uher's *Catching the Sun in a Net* (1962). The episode was quickly buried, but two years later came a clash over Schorm's *Everyday Courage*. Never before had anyone dared to show such a melancholy 'hero of our times' as Jan Kacer in the role of the disillusioned communist worker. But this quarrel, too, although exacerbated by the award of the Czechoslovak Film Critics Prize to the film, was finally settled—whether because to ban a film of indisputable artistic quality seemed politically inadvisable at the time, or because official circles saw an opportunity to make a show of 'anti-dogmatism'. The hostility to innovation, especially that emanating from the younger generation, persisted nonetheless and became more pronounced as more and more nonconformist works came out of the studios; again things worked up to a crisis.

Outwardly the thunder and lightning descended on two films, *Daisies* (Chytilová) and *The Party and the Guests* (Nemec), but actually the tide of official wrath covered the entire field of committed film-making. Since the work was unassailable on aesthetic grounds, the attack was directed against an alleged lack of national feeling, anti-socialist slant, kowtowing to anti-Marxist philosophy, and there was even talk of ideological subversion. Both films (first *Daisies*, much later *The Party and the Guests*) were ultimately granted at least restricted release, but in the minds of the authorities a resolve was already smouldering—why wait for the finished article, why not go to the root of the matter; in short, they planned to reorganise the film industry under strict political control. But before they could get round to it the year 1968 had arrived.

1968 came in as a year of high hopes. The plans for reorganising the film industry having been swept aside in the political upheaval, projects that had long been kept on ice could now go ahead—Jires' *The Joke*, Jurácek's *Case for a Young Executioner* and Schorm's *End of a Priest*. All seemed well, and the studios were working at top pressure.

It is not the purpose of this article to recapitulate the subsequent period, but rather to describe the special circumstances that ultimately led the Czech cinema to one of its most remarkable paradoxes. After the entry of the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968, the paradoxical situation was more sharply defined. While immediately after the invasion the political scene underwent a profound if chaotic transformation, with the clear aim of putting the country back in the orthodox straitjacket, film-making continued along the course entered with such spirit during the Dubcek, 'post-January' era. And such was the élan that in the space of little more than a year the figure for top quality output reached in the most fruitful 'new wave' years was surpassed. Between autumn 1968 and about the end of 1969 the following above-average films were produced: *Adelheid* (Vlácil), *Aesop* (Valcanov), *Vtáckovia, siroty a blázni* (*Birds, Orphans and Fools*, Jakubisko), *Pripad pro zacinajiciho kata* (*Case for a Young Executioner*, Jurácek), *Ecce homo Homolka* (Papousek), *Genius* (Uher), *Zabitá nedele* (*Deadly Sunday*, Vihanová), *Ucho* (*Raw Recruit*, Kachyna), *Kladivo na carodejnice* (*Witch Hammer*, Vávra), *Skrivánci na nitich* (*Larks on a Thread*, Menzel), *Touha zvaná Anada* (*Desire by the Name of Anada*, Kadar and Klos), *322* (Hanák), *Ovoce stromu rajskych jime* (*Forbidden Fruit*, Chytilová), *Den sedmy, osmá noc* (*Seventh Day, Eighth Night*, Schorm), *Smutecni slavnost* (*Burial with Honour*, Sirový). To complete the list there are several films shot before August 1968 which reached the cinemas at the end of that year or at the beginning of 1969: *Faráruv konec*

'The Deserter and the Nomads'

(*End of a Priest*, Schorm), *Spalovac mrtvol* (*The Cremator*, Herz), *Vsichni dobri rodáci* (*All Good Countrymen* or *Moravian Chronicle*, Jasný), *The Deserter and the Nomads* (Jakubisko), and *The Joke* (Jires).

And so, during the months of profound crisis following the invasion, we had the making, or release, of twenty films which made not the slightest concession to the political debacle; what is more, in number and to a considerable degree in quality they represent the high point for Czech feature film production in the entire post-war era. A phenomenon in its way unique, for it has demonstrated that artistic creation can not only anticipate political development (as witnessed in our country after 1956, and again after 1962), but in some circumstances it can run far ahead. We see that, after all, even when cultural policies are dictated by a doctrinaire system as they are in the socialist countries of today, ideas and creative work in the arts do not always have to be subservient to the political direction of the moment; they respond far more sensitively to the direction of the social and national consciousness, and in responding to this consciousness they help to shape it.

Never has this interplay functioned so perfectly as in 1968–69; and herein lies the source of the paradox. Quite simply, people ignored the political facts (and to this day, by passive resistance or latent opposition, they are in effect still ignoring them). As far as the cinema is concerned, this means that the remarkable achievements noted above were not merely works born during the spell of freedom and still emerging from the pipeline; they were quite conscious demonstrations of a refusal to give in. When the art of the film should have been silent, it bore rich fruit, when it should have died, it lived. Call it what you like—romanticism, defiance, protest—the main thing is the moral quality of the act. An event which under any other circumstances would be of little interest except to the historian is charged with a profound significance because it reflects something of the national character; and the responsibility of the artist towards the society for which he speaks.

It has not really been in the tradition of Czechoslovak film-making to play this role. Even when it had escaped from the bonds of commercialism to become a nationalised industry, it still bore—despite all the slogans then current about the 'most important', the 'mass' art—the marks of its plebeian origins, its provincialism and its character as a profitable artefact. It is one thing to be regarded as the vehicle of lofty spiritual values, quite another to be just popular. The film-makers had always had to content themselves with being placed in the second category; a success here and there might be a straw in the wind, but at bottom it changed nothing. At least not until the Sixties, when the turning point came with the 'new wave'. Freed from dogma and bureaucratic chains, the film at last spoke out with the voice of the genuine national culture. No longer did it have to apologise for its spiritual inferiority, and for the first time it found attentive audiences outside the ranks of the supporters of political orthodoxy. The twenty films listed above represent both the highest point reached on this path, and its epilogue.

The phase with which we are concerned is one of growing tension between the political reality of Czechoslovakia following the invasion of August 1968 and the reality in the world of the arts. In the case of the cinema it is perhaps rather surprising that political interference was delayed for so long. There were several reasons. First, in the general confusion into which the country had been plunged the administration had at first little time to bother about the arts. Secondly, any effective intervention involved restructuring the organisation and personnel of film production; this was not carried out until the second half of 1969, and even then the authorities refrained from imposing a rigid censorship because, thirdly, such a step presupposed that at least some attempt would be made to subject the previous era to a critical evaluation. And here was the rub, for it was no simple matter to make a clean sweep, 'in the spirit of the new reality', as they say, of an era that in terms of artistic achievement and response abroad had been unprecedented in the history of Czech cinema. Moreover—and fourthly—there were just no qualified people able and willing to formulate a new set of principles in the light of which the output of the Sixties could be critically reviewed and a new policy formulated. So in place of serious criticism we had journalistic invective; and as for the official pronouncements by representatives of the industry, one is struck by their intellectual shallowness, their evasion of the key issues and their mouthing of political clichés.

There was, then, no question of an open confrontation between two ideological fronts. Preference was given to backroom, bureaucratic procedure, which made no claims on the intelligence of its authors and simply

ignored public opinion, presenting a *fait accompli* without any attempt to offer even a slightly plausible explanation of what was going on. And at first, in any case, the actual intentions of cultural policy could only be guessed at from symptoms rather than from practical measures. Jasný's *Moravian Chronicle* and Jires' *The Joke* could, for instance, still be entered at international festivals, where they won several awards; but their subsequent journey led quietly to the shelf.

A consequence of this shamefaced procedure was that for a long time no one could really tell on which of the films shot in 1969 and 1970 the political anathema had fallen and which would be refused a general release. Only by mid-1970 was it found that at least eight films were affected.

— *Seventh Day, Eighth Night* (script Zdenek Mahler, director Evald Schorm). A parable on human helplessness. The prophecies of a man suffering from persecution mania, and a series of happenings that seem to confirm his prophecies, inspire the inhabitants of a village with a sense of impending doom. Auto-suggestion and brooding prove to be corrosive agents—it is enough to plant the seed of fear in men's minds and they finish the job themselves. In the end, when everything seems to be returning to normal, an ominous sound is heard: a huge tank roars into the village.

— *Aesop* (script Angel Wagenstein, director Rangel Valcanov; Czechoslovak-Bulgarian co-production). The screenplay is inspired by the fate of the author of the *Fables*. Thanks to his intellect, Aesop the slave becomes a free man, but his intellect also dooms him to perish. Society has no need for men like him.

— *Larks on a Thread* (from a story by Bohumil Hrabal, *Advertisement for a House I Don't Want to Live In*; director Jirí Menzel). A motley collection of people has gathered in a steel works at Kladno, near Prague: ex-lawyers, office workers, prostitutes, convicts, a group of women serving sentences for attempting to leave the country illegally. . . The story tells of people who have been cast out on the periphery of society, people who either rebel against their fate or accept it with religious humility, or whose attitude to life is of a primitive, instinctive nature.

— *Burial with Honour* (from a story by Eva Kanturková, director Zdenek Sirový). A country woman wants to arrange a ceremonial funeral for her husband in the village from which, years ago, they had been expelled as kulaks. She believes that even such an evil man as her husband deserves respect after death. The bureaucrat who vehemently opposes her wish is an out-and-out scoundrel; but the widow gets her way in the end.

— *Raw Recruit* (script Jan Procházka, director Karel Kachyna). A psychological study of a man who senses that somehow catastrophe awaits him.

— *Birds, Orphans and Fools* (script Juraj Jakubisko and Karol Sidon, director Jakubisko). The fool Yorik, the photographer Andrej and the girl Martha dream of happiness and freedom. When their dream, symbolised by an idyll in a railwayman's cottage, comes true, they find that their longed-for happiness has turned to dust and ashes.

— *Deadly Sunday* (from a prize-winning story by Jirí Krenka, director Drahomíra Vihanová). A young army officer, stationed somewhere in the depths of the country, spends a besotted Sunday afternoon brooding over his ill-spent life. Having matched the milestones of his life against what he had aimed for and what he has achieved, he ends the whole dismal reckoning with a bullet in the head.

— *The Deserter and the Nomads* (a trilogy of stories: *Deserters*, theme by Jakubisko and Tazky; . . . *and*, theme from a chapter of Tazky's novel *Cellar Full of Wolves*; *Nomads*, theme Jakubisko and Sidon. Directed by Jakubisko). The first story, which was originally shot as a separate film, has been shown at home and abroad. The ban was probably earned by the second theme: the war is over when Nazi troops attack a farm where the people, whose relationships had once alternated between enmity, suspicion and love for one another, have now made friends. In the ensuing battle, in which a drunken Soviet officer joins, they all kill each other. The third story is a search for Life. It is sought by the Girl, the transmitter of life, and it is sought by Death, for death cannot live without life. They travel together through a barren, depopulated world, and the Girl dies. In the end Death, now alone, also perishes.

To complete the list we may add that, after the defection of the leading actress to the West, the première of Václav Matejka's *Nahota* (*Nudity*) was also cancelled. (This is the drama of a young convict who, during a five-day spell of home leave, tries to trace the fate of the mother he has never known, and makes an appalling discovery.) And the same happened in the case of *Pasták* (*Reformatory*), directed by Hynek Bocan: a tale of a teacher who comes into conflict with his charges, is tricked, beaten up and finally resigns.

So in one way or another ten films, a horrifying third of the annual output, have fallen victim to the 'new reality'. Leaving aside the financial loss, estimated at some 40 million Czechoslovak crowns, we are more concerned here with the losses that cannot be measured in material terms. We repeat, these are not artistically inferior films. As has been the case in earlier times, the inferior, run-of-the-mill product still gets the green light; it is on the intellectually sophisticated, the serious, the above-average films that the axe has fallen.

Like any other authoritarian regime, the Czechoslovak authorities have dealt with nonconformism in culture—a world of which such regimes are always suspicious—by anonymous acts of power. And the conformist critics, in so far as film critics can be said to exist under present conditions, obediently trot out the political clichés of the day, labelling anything that does not fit the preconceived pattern as 'anti-socialist'. In this view there is just one kind of socialism—the Soviet kind—and whoever refuses to accept this, whoever rejects the enforced 'reality' of Czechoslovakia today, is 'anti'.

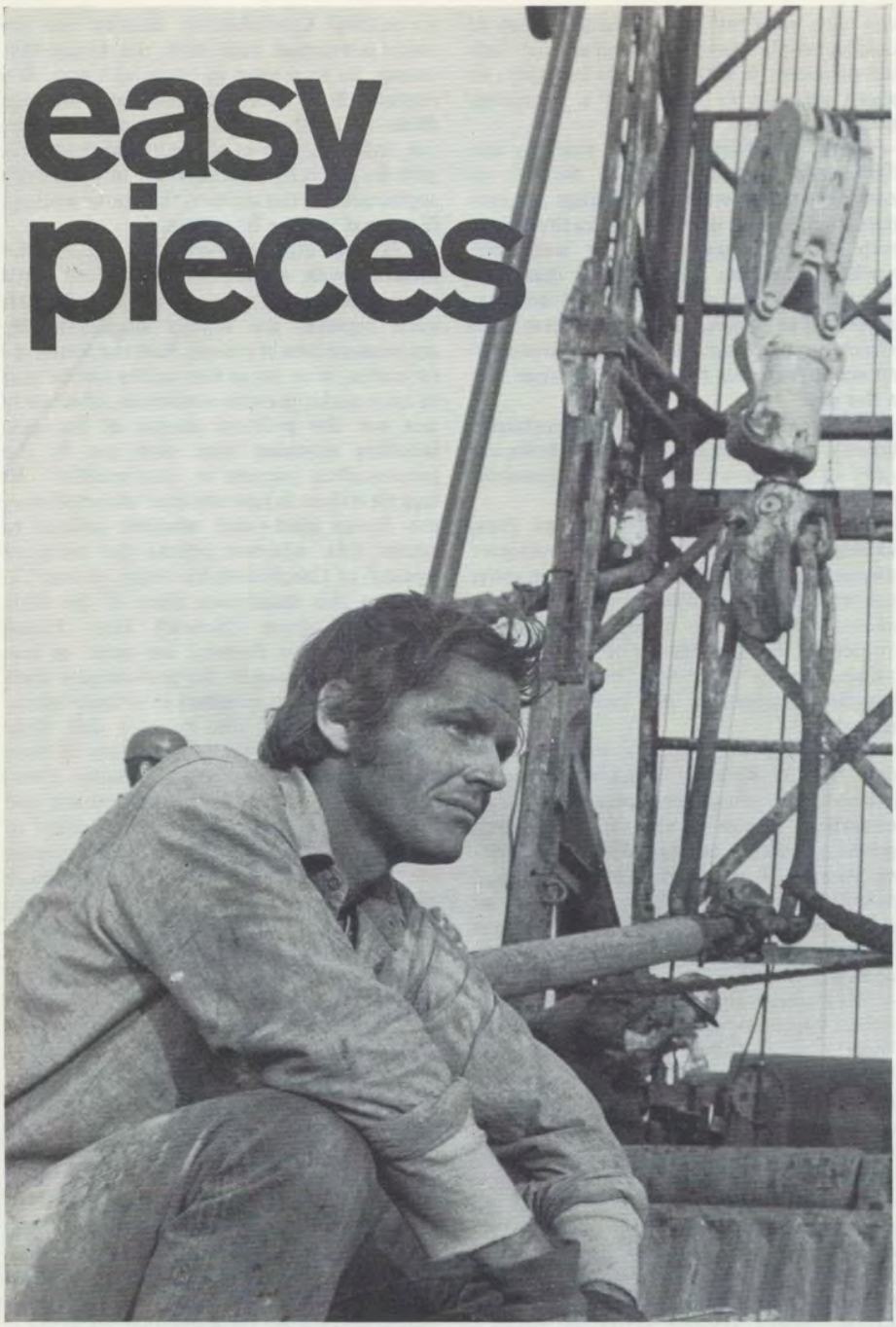
From this standpoint some of the films mentioned above (*Seventh Day*, *Eighth Night* and *Raw Recruit*) are more or less outright responses to the post-August 1968 situation, though couched in artistic idiom. Of the others it can be said that their opposition lies in the whole spirit of their conception, while in some (*Forbidden Fruit*) it appears at least in the style. In content and in style these films continue the pattern of the 'pre-August' productions, but the tone has changed—it is more pessimistic, more sceptical, blacker. In more than one film there is an almost utter hopelessness (*Deadly Sunday*); bitterness rather than anger prevails in the treatment of human, moral and social relationships.

The range of styles is as varied as ever. Alongside the 'sociological' comedy (*Ecce homo Homolka*) we find the fantastic comedy (*Genius*); alongside the historical analogy (*Witch Hammer*), the fictional satire (*Case for a Young Executioner*); alongside the politically barbed drama (*Burial with Honour*), the bizarre morality (*Birds, Orphans and Fools*). In sum, however—which does not exclude exceptions (*Desire by the Name of Anada*)—this swan song of what was yesterday still the 'new' Czechoslovak cinema has for its leitmotiv a mood of bitter disillusionment. Not that it is in ideas or artistic treatment in any way decadent (on the contrary), but it bears the unmistakable stamp of an era that is politically and morally poisoned. On the whole, a faithful reflection of the spiritual climate, of a people who have been humiliated, their visions trampled on and their hopes betrayed.

Those critics who try to dismiss this complex intellectual and emotional situation by coming out with political catchwords about 'anti-socialism' and the like are guilty of reducing the social consciousness to the level of moves on the Party chessboard. For no art can spring from ready-made categories, least of all political categories. Art must start from the empirical; if it is to help shape society, it must first 'reflect' the condition of that society. Criticism would have to explore the quality and faithfulness of this reflection, its social and psychological soil, and judge the value of the empirical observation. But that is precisely the job that the Czechoslovak film critics of today have shirked. It would lead them on to dangerously thin ice. ■

'322'

easy pieces



Jack Nicholson in 'Five Easy Pieces'

Stephen Farber

The success of *Five Easy Pieces* in America has been one encouraging sign for American movies in an otherwise depressing time. In 1969 the surprising popularity of unconventional, 'downbeat' movies like *Midnight Cowboy*, *Alice's Restaurant*, *They Shoot Horses*, *Don't They?* and, particularly, *Easy Rider* seemed to represent the beginning of a vital new phase in the development of the American film. Younger film-makers were given unusual freedom to create personal projects dealing frankly with contemporary social problems. But most everything went wrong in 1970. On the one hand, many film-makers tried a little too self-consciously to make 'youth movies', bringing only the most superficial understanding to highly-charged subjects like campus rebellion and revolutionary politics. And the audience recognised the superficiality; almost all of these films were commercial failures. Other film-makers became infatuated with their freedom and blinded by the new star-status of the movie director, and turned to indulgent 'personal films' that often seemed so private as to be impenetrable. 1970 began with promises of a renaissance in American films, but by the end of the year the industry was in the middle of a new slump, and there was little to be optimistic about. By far the most successful pictures of the year were two corpses from an earlier era of movie-making—*Airport* and *Love Story*.

Only *Five Easy Pieces*, written by Adrien Joyce and directed by Bob Rafelson, fulfils the promise of the 1969 films. Like *Easy Rider*, *Five Easy Pieces* is a 'road' picture, the loosely structured, rough, lyrical picaresque adventures of a contemporary American drifter. It is an independently produced film, unorthodox in both theme and style, as *Easy Rider* was; but it is also a more mature and honest work, a critique of some of the unacknowledged assumptions of *Easy Rider*. (Since many of the same people worked on both films, I don't think it is going too far to see *Five Easy Pieces* as a deliberate comment on the earlier film's evasions.)

The quietness of *Five Easy Pieces* comes as something of a surprise. In the last few years American films have been growing steadily harsher in their denunciations of the failures of contemporary American society. By early 1970, in films like *Easy Rider*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Medium Cool*, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, *Joe*, and *WUSA*, the accusations against America had reached an extremely feverish, hysterical pitch. *Easy Rider* was the archetypal paranoid anti-American film. It began by invoking some enduring myths—the freedom of the open road, the magical power of the unpolluted land, the journey away from civilisation as a regenerative experience containing the secret of life. But when the free-living heroes reached the end of the road, they came up against the true virulence of contemporary American civilisation, and were slaughtered by men who could not tolerate their unconventionality. The interesting thing about *Easy Rider* was its sentimentality about American frontier myths; the film never questioned the myths themselves—which desperately *need* questioning—but instead turned its anger against the Southern bigots who, in forgetting their nation's heritage, betrayed a once noble dream.

Another film released at about the same time, Francis Ford Coppola's *The Rain People*, tried for a much more penetrating and comprehensive examination of the failure of the myths; as a result, while *Easy Rider* was breaking box-office records, *The Rain People* died quietly and disappeared. They began at almost the same point. *The Rain People*, like *Easy Rider*, concerned a journey away from civilisation, into the open spaces of middle America—a woman trying to escape the growing oppressiveness of her suburban married life by breaking free and running, looking for an answer to her frustrations on the road. But unlike *Easy Rider*, Coppola's film asked us to see that the search for freedom might conceal an evasion of responsibility. The heroine of *The Rain People* was running from an honest confrontation with herself when she headed for the open road. Though this was a modest, unselfconscious film, it was moving toward a more radical reconsideration of American society than could be found in the shriller anti-American films; it meant to point up the inadequacy, the hollowness of even our most cherished ideals.

Five Easy Pieces extends these criticisms of American myths in a more thoughtful and coherent way. The character played by Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider*, a smalltown liberal lawyer, felt an exuberant sense of liberation travelling with his motorcycle buddies; he

was murdered by Southern rednecks bitterly envious of his freedom. Shortly before his death, trying to analyse the hatred he had encountered, he said, 'This used to be a hell of a good country. I don't know what happened to it... People talk about individual freedom, but when they see a really free individual, it scares them.' The character played (brilliantly) by Nicholson in *Five Easy Pieces* still believes in the mystique of the open road, but something more disturbing has gone wrong. This time there are no rednecks to prevent him from realising his dream; he moves from place to place casually, picking up and leaving whenever he feels like it, travelling free and easy, always uncommitted. But he seems lost, and his life seems empty. At first, to be sure, his rootlessness has a certain charm; we are taken by his vitality and directness, his openness to experience, the relish with which he plays at a variety of roles. But the irony of his situation is striking: this time, in his desperate search for freedom, the drifter has *turned into* a redneck.

'Five Easy Pieces'

Five Easy Pieces looks for some of the psychological reasons for the hero's rootlessness, tries to 'place' it in very specific autobiographical terms, and so provides a more rounded, dispassionate understanding of the American drifter than a more sentimental film 'ballad' like *Easy Rider*. Bobby Dupea comes from a family of distinguished musicians who live on a lovely estate on an island in Puget Sound; but he finds their provinciality suffocating, and he has run from their withering gentility. When the film opens, he is living almost a defiant caricature of his past life—working as an oil rigger, living with a dumb, sluttish waitress, hanging around cheap cafés and bowling alleys. But the caricature becomes indistinguishable from its target: Bobby knows that the ignorant poor are as provincial and complacent as the cultured rich. He is looking for an honest, direct life-style that will shatter the polite pretences of the world in which he has been bred, but his 'honesty' becomes another lie, a new kind of mask, a way of closing out the insecurities that haunt him. Even his sexual directness, which he sees as a rebellious challenge to the intellectual aridity of his family's world, can be an evasion. After a low-key scene of a painful, dispiriting meeting between Bobby and his sister, Rafelson cuts boldly to a startling scene of Bobby engaging in some very vigorous love-making with a casual pickup. The transition economically and effectively implies the defensiveness of Bobby's sexual intensity.

Bobby *uses* his alienation, his rootlessness, his 'freedom' as a way of getting himself out of difficult situations. When things begin to turn sour, or when the emotional ties become too complicated, he can always say, 'I don't belong here,' and move on. His alienation is only an excuse to evade the responsibilities of relationships with other people. After Bobby has admitted that he is thinking of leaving his girl-friend Rayette, though she is pregnant, his oil-rigger friend begins a homely, self-righteous sermon about a man's responsibility to a woman. Bobby blows up, sneering, 'I don't know why I'm sitting here listening to some cracker asshole give me advice.' Because he remains an outsider to every world he travels through, he can mock the pieties that the people who *are* involved take more seriously. Although the film expects us to share Bobby's scepticism toward clichés, it does not ignore the moral appraisals that he scoffs at so cavalierly. We can see that Rayette is utterly dependent on him, and that he has encouraged her quite recklessly, without any concern about what she may suffer whenever he decides to move on.

Francis Ford Coppola's 'The Rain People'

For Bobby's carelessness—towards himself as well as toward others—is an inevitable price of his liberation. In a rare moment of self-awareness, he sums up a few years of his life to his father: 'I move around a lot, not because I'm looking for anything, but to get away from things that go bad if I stay. Auspicious beginnings . . . ' In *Easy Rider*, as in the classic American myths that it reworks, drifting is a poetic experience, and the drifter's life is enriched by all his hard travelling. In *Five Easy Pieces* Bobby's drifting prevents him from confronting who he is, and stunts his life. On his return home in the second half of the film, he becomes deeply attracted to his brother's fiancée Catherine, a lovely, withdrawn pianist. But after a brief affair, she rejects him, judging him harshly and directly: 'Where would it lead? A man with no love for himself, no respect for himself, no love for friends, family, work, *anything*—how can he ask for love from someone else?' The life that she has chosen for herself—retreating to what Bobby calls a 'rest home' of music and gentility—may be excessively safe and provincial, but her honesty with herself, her willingness to accept realistic limitations, provide a gauge against which we have to

measure Bobby. She knows who she is, and he does not.

Bobby's rebellion against his family is empty and misguided—his emotional ties to his past are still strong, and in attempting to make an absolute break, he simplifies his own nature, ignores the ambivalence of his responses, and cuts himself off from the gentleness and sensitivity he might draw on. His carelessness means that he must lose Catherine, and the film convinces us that he has lost something valuable. His future, 'free' though it may be, seems doomed to contain no grace, no beauty, no love. The scenes between Bobby and Catherine are quiet and unobtrusive, but they establish a possibility that Bobby's rootless way of life inevitably sacrifices. In all of these scenes with Bobby's family, Rafelson works with great delicacy and close attention to detail, and he achieves an almost Chekhovian sense of melancholy and pathos; his is a distinctive directorial talent.

Perhaps the young audiences that have made *Five Easy Pieces* a success in America read the film as another celebration of the heroic free spirit in revolt against a repressive, enervated society. They do applaud Bobby's irreverence, even in the falsest scene in the film—the cocktail party at which he savagely attacks the intellectual pretensions of his brother's guests. But if young people blindly identify with Bobby as one more abused, put-upon victim of materialism, they are misreading the film. *Five Easy Pieces* is remarkable for its scepticism and understated complexity; it is also remarkable for the perception and precision with which it delineates an *individual* character, who is idiosyncratic enough to resist anyone's theories of social malaise.

The end of the film is bleak: frightened of the prospects ahead of him, Bobby leaves Rayette and picks up and runs again, on a spur-of-the-moment decision riding off with a truck driver who is heading for Alaska, the last American frontier. Shivering in the truck in the very last scene, Bobby mumbles 'I'm fine, I'm fine,' but his face is like a frightened child's; we cannot hold out much hope for his future. Even so, the film as a whole does not seem cynical or masochistic. Unlike *Easy Rider* or *Midnight Cowboy*, *Five Easy Pieces* is not content simply to wallow in a self-satisfied paranoid fantasy of an America gone mad: its interest in questioning myths is an interest in re-creating life. Rafelson's serious attempt to imagine alternatives to Bobby's empty existence, though not entirely satisfactory, represents a concern about the quality of personal life that may presage a gentler, more open and explorative mood in American films.

Already one can observe similarly inchoate tendencies toward revaluation of social and personal myths in several more awkward and confused American films. Like the hero of *Five Easy Pieces*, the hero of *Adam at 6 a.m.*, a young semantics professor, finds his intellectual middle class world stifling, and he leaves Los Angeles to journey back to his family home in rural Missouri, hoping to refresh his life by spending a summer with simpler people. Gradually he realises that their life is as false and empty as the one he has tried to escape, and that there is no answer to his dissatisfaction on the open road. The point of the Charles Eastman-Sidney Furie film *Little Fauss and Big Halsy* has been badly obscured by some last-minute changes in structure; but Eastman's original intention was to undercut the tendency to idealise the free-wheeling, free-loving motorcycle hero played by Robert Redford. The film meant to trace the moral awakening of the once idolatrous Little Fauss (Michael J. Pollard), as he came to realise the irresponsibility and callousness implicit in the swaggering style of his hero Big Halsy. Some of this moral concern can still be seen in the film, although its focus has been blurred.

In *I Walk the Line* John Frankenheimer tries to question American myths by casting Gregory Peck in another version of the archetypal role which made him a star—the simple, upright smalltown sheriff—and then having Peck play *against* type. During the film Peck's confident sense of virtue is shattered when he falls desperately in love with a cunning moonshiner's daughter, and begins to lie and even break the law for her. Although he is disoriented by this change in his life's moral pattern, he is brave enough to want to leave his past behind and run off with her; but ironically, it is she who is too closely tied to her family to imagine such a radical break. Paul Mazursky's *Alex in Wonderland* concerns a film director fresh from the success of a first film, trying to keep his private life in control in spite of tremendous external pressures. All of these films have very serious flaws, and *Adam at 6 a.m.* and *Alex in Wonderland* are almost complete failures, but they are interesting as a group because of their examination of people trying to absorb changes in their lives, reassessing and

'Five Easy Pieces': Susan Anspach and Jack Nicholson

repudiating cultural myths as they work to refashion personal identity.

These are the same qualities that distinguish Arthur Penn's evocative *Little Big Man*. This film does not at first seem comparable to the others, for it is an ambitious, expensive historical epic. But in spite of the great events that it covers, from before the Civil War to the Battle of Little Big Horn, and the historical figures who swirl through it—General Custer, Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill—its strongest impulse is a gentle nostalgia for ordinary life. Unlike *Five Easy Pieces*, *Little Big Man* treats large social questions—the settlement of the West, the relationship of white man to Indian—but, like Rafelson's film, it shows an unusual interest in the quality of *individual* life, the search for personal identity even in the midst of social cataclysms.

Some critics have taken the social message as the dominant one, and have read the film simply as one more portentous sermon on white American racism. But although this is certainly part of its meaning, and although the massacre sequences are the dramatic high points, the true significance of the film is to be found elsewhere, in the rich mosaic of *undramatic* moments that surround these peaks of social outrage. In fact, in the very first scene Penn and writer Calder Willingham warn the liberal audience to be wary of political generalisations. The 121-year-old survivor of Little Big Horn, Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman), is being interviewed by a rodent-like oral historian about the culture of the plains Indians. The researcher talks very glibly about 'genocide', and sees Crabb as no more than a crude racial stereotype, a white man who must have helped to exterminate the red man. The story that Jack tells may seem, at moments, to document the charge of genocide, but by mocking the researcher's attempt to summarise Jack's life with fashionable liberal slogans, Penn clearly is alerting us to look at Jack Crabb's past in a more complex way. Penn refuses to see Jack's life as merely an illustration of a cause, an example to be used in some dispassionate historian's theory. *Little Big Man* insists that a man's life is irreducible, and that it has a significance which eludes and transcends any simple sociological labels.

'Little Big Man': Jack Crabb as a 'human being' among the Cheyenne

Actually, all of Penn's films concern an individual searching for a sense of identity, testing himself against cultural myths as he attempts to define who he is. Jack Crabb's search involves a phenomenal number of transitional stages; he tries on identities like new suits of clothes—at various moments in his life he is a religious fanatic, a swindler, an Indian scout, a mule-skinner, a gunfighter, a drunk, and a hermit. The great national heroes portrayed in the film provide him with models (for example, when he first looks up at General Custer, he sees only a burst of sunlight), but the progress of the film is a series of disillusionments. Role after role proves false and hypocritical. A white boy raised by the Cheyenne, then recaptured by whites, and moving back and forth between Indian and white society throughout most of the film, Jack is an outsider to both worlds; like the hero of *Five Easy Pieces*, he belongs nowhere. But it is the Indians, and especially the old chief whom he calls Grandfather, who offer the only measure of permanence in his life. And yet, ironically, he is obsessed with the urge to make something of himself in white society; he is not willing to accept the simpler identity—'Little Big Man'—that he has among the Indians.

Jack Crabb is a drifter, an adventurer in the classic American mould, but at times he seems like a chameleon; he is so malleable that even his character changes in response to his environment and the people around him. The simplicity and gentleness he has among the Indians give way to awkwardness, aggressiveness, and deceitfulness whenever he returns to white society and moves among the poseurs and the madmen. (The variations in Dustin Hoffman's performance express Jack's rather frightening adaptability; in the scenes with his white wife, or Custer, or the lascivious preacher's wife played by Faye Dunaway, Hoffman is often deliberately mannered, arch and artificial, while in the scenes with Old Lodge Skins he plays with surprising understatement and dignity. This is easily his best performance to date.) Jack is seduced by the ideals of his society and he tries for heroic action, but he can never bring it off. Even when he tries to kill Custer, he bungles it, and is painfully humiliated because of his ineptitude. Though he is resolutely ordinary, he does not see that his ordinariness conceals a quiet moral strength; he is by nature incapable of violence, and although he is enough of a victim of American myths to regard this instinctive gentleness as cowardice, we see it as his greatest quality. In the same way, Jack spends years emulating the heroes of American society, searching for a career that will bring him respectability, fame and fortune. He does not see that in Indian society, where he is simply a 'human being' without a career or an honorific social role to play, his life has a 'centre' that it otherwise lacks. Like Bobby Dupea, he runs away from what he is in pursuit of self-defeating dreams; his restlessness is an evasion, and he matures only when he realises that he can settle down.

Jack's life is a chaotic mosaic of irregular, undramatic pieces. Only one scene in the film—the killing of his Indian wife—is conceived in extraordinary terms, as a high tragic climax, a searing vision of annihilation; and it is beautifully filmed and edited, the details frozen and abstracted to suggest the one transcendent moment in Jack's life. But it is interesting that this climax comes not at the end of the film, but only about two-thirds of the way through. Penn insists on following it with anti-climaxes—more ragged, picaresque adventures as a drunk and a hermit, an abortive suicide attempt, and Jack's final return to the Indians after the Battle of Little Big Horn. Penn, like Rafelson, wants to explore notions of personal maturity and self-definition, and *Little Big Man*, like *Five Easy Pieces*, shows respect for the quirks of individual life; it is almost a tribute to the eccentricities of human experience.

Movies mirror the times, and it is not surprising that many American films in the Nixon era are once again celebrating wholesomeness and apathy, retreating from a realistic appraisal of social evils to safe romantic fantasies. Films like *Five Easy Pieces* and, in a different way, *Little Big Man*, suggest one positive aspect of this withdrawal from society. These films represent a turning inward, a concern with self-knowledge; they both reflect and criticise contemporary experimentation in the area of personal relationships, the questioning of traditional conceptions of identity. Their interest in reassessing American myths, but with tentativeness and compassion instead of anger, and their success in creating complex unheroic characters, are welcome new qualities in American movies. ■

IN THE PICTURE

Under Milk Wood

There is an end of term atmosphere in the Fishguard Bay Hotel. Actors sit around an almost deserted lounge idly drinking tea, waiting for a call to a location fifteen miles away or wondering how they can rehearse a scene with an actress who's already left. The wardrobe master talks about his next assignment; on a table in the lobby a sheaf of call sheets lies untouched, despite the assistant director's efforts to pep them up with jokes about yesterday's mishaps and the whereabouts of today's props. In an empty corridor an eerily disembodied voice suddenly breaks the silence: 'There is no leg belonging to the foot that belongs to this shoe.' The sound recordists are working with a tape-recorder in one of the few occupied rooms. The voice booms out again, and again.

The voice belongs to Jack Black the cobbler in Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*, which Andrew Sinclair has been filming in and around this little town on the Pembrokeshire coast. Why not Laugharne, which was probably Thomas' model for the Llaregyb of *Milk Wood*, and whose citizens were evidently none too pleased by Sinclair's preference for Fishguard? Sinclair spent months driving round West Wales looking for the right location and Fishguard, he says, had everything he wanted. Walking round the harbour in the lower town, one sees why he was so taken with the place. There indeed is the 'hunched, courters'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeblack . . . sea'; and here in the darkness, where Coronation Street meets Cockle Row, it's difficult to tell which of the 'humble two-storied houses' is real and which merely the art department's façades 'prinking themselves out in crude colours and by the liberal use of pinkwash.'

Under Milk Wood is Sinclair's second film. His first was *The Breaking of Bumbo*, adapted from his own novel; after more than a year it is still tied up with the distributors, and understandably Sinclair prefers not to talk about it. There's no accounting for shifts in public taste (*vide* the current box-office success of *Tales of Beatrix Potter*), but after the troubles with *Bumbo* even to contemplate filming a radio play by a poet remembered as much for his fondness for the bottle as for his facility with words could seem to be courting disaster.

Sinclair is undaunted. 'I'm convinced it will be a popular success. Thomas was a people's poet and I'm a populist.' Sinclair's enthusiasm for Thomas is persuasive; he has already directed a stage version of *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, and he's nourished the idea of filming *Milk Wood* for years. But how was it financed at all at a time when British production was sagging and other, ostensibly less esoteric projects were being shelved? 'It was,' Sinclair explains, 'an extraordinary series of Celtic miracles.' John Terry of the NFFC agreed to back the film, and Sinclair's publishing venture, Lorrimer Books, was doing well. The trump card was the acquisition of the Burtons. Elizabeth Taylor was filming in England, and Burton, who knew Thomas and played one of the two linking voices in the original radio production of the play, expressed interest. Seventeen years after that first production Burton plays the same part; Taylor is Rosie Probert ('Thirty-three Duck Lane. Come on up, boys, I'm dead'); the other box-office draw is Peter O'Toole as blind Captain Cat, a role he has already filled in a stage production. The rest of the cast reads like an Eisteddfod roll-call. 'This is a 90 per cent Welsh movie, which is as it should be.'

Thomas described *Milk Wood* as 'an impression for voices, an entertainment out of the darkness.' How is Sinclair planning to translate into visual terms what is essentially a free-ranging verse play written for the mind's eye? How, for instance, can the film incorporate Thomas' elaborate puns or his extensive use of stichomythia? 'Yes, the play is an incantation to imagination. But what I'm doing is to make concrete what is imagination. Fidelity can be a great sin. Mr. Pugh's dream, for example, is hopeless in film terms, so we're relying on sight gags here. But I've taken everything from Thomas, the only things I've added are his' (actually from *Return Journey*, in which Thomas revisits his home town in search of his childhood). Sinclair is concerned to preserve the lilting rhythm of the play. 'It's exactly like a symphony. I've tried to create a sense of continuous fluid movement—I'm mad on Ophüls. We work out what everyone in the village is doing, as in *Akenfield*, so that we can sight them in place and time. You'll notice that there's a lot of left to right movement in the film. And the transitions are there in the text—the sea, dreams—a bit like the waves on a ECG chart, if you like.'

On location about half an hour's drive from Fishguard, Sinclair waits for his cameraman Bob Huke (who photographed *The Virgin and the Gypsy*) to line up a shot. 'I want it to be an "old" film. I'm trying to get a feeling of nostalgia, so I'm shooting through gauze to give the colours a muted look.' The sound engineers are running wildtrack. 'This is the great M*A*S*H technique,' Sinclair explains, 'wildtrack after wildtrack after wildtrack. The quality of the sound here is different, and post-synching is so awful.' The scene is a Baptist chapel, nestling in a wood above a quarry whose distant rumbling periodically interrupts the shooting. It is a cold, miserable day, and after watching Sinclair check the wording on a tombstone in an overgrown graveyard (is 'Reverend' right, or should it be the Welsh 'Parch'?), I take refuge in the chapel. A minister climbs down from the high pulpit, picking his way gingerly through pews festooned with cables and lamps. 'Do you know the Lord's Prayer? Is it in Mark? I can't find it in Mark, maybe it's in Luke.' He repeats in Welsh what I can remember in English. This is Aubrey Richards, Sinbad Sailors in the original radio production and now playing the Reverend Eli Jenkins.

'Under Milk Wood': Richard Burton and Ryan Davies, first and second voices.

Sinclair interrupts our hesitant bilingual recitation. 'Well, we needn't go further than "Give us this day our daily bread" and then we can cut in the shot of the cow mooing.' The Lord's Prayer scene finished, Sinclair retires to a pew to read *Private Eye*. The momentary peace is shattered as Burton's voice booms out from a tape-recorder: 'It is night in the chill, squat chapel . . . sucking mintoes, fortywinking hallelujah.' A track up to the pulpit is timed to his voice. 'Some of this equipment is forty years old, it's ludicrous,' Sinclair says, 'but what you're

'Under Milk Wood': Vivien Merchant and Talfryn Thomas. '. . . and mixes especially for Mrs. Pugh a venomous porridge unknown to toxicologists.'

hiring is a cameraman and all his own private secrets.' Aubrey Richards, who knew Thomas, rhapsodises about the words and worries whether the film is going to lose their magic. Later, as Bob Huke adjusts and readjusts a branch, Sinclair needs seven takes for a scene in the graveyard. 'This should have been a good day and it's like walking through treacle.'

On the way back from the location I'm sandwiched in the back seat of a car between Organ Morgan and Mr. Waldo, still in costume. 'Oh, but you should have been here when Elizabeth Taylor arrived,' Organ Morgan enthuses, 'it was like Cleopatra and her retinue.' In the hotel bar the wardrobe man, recently engaged on *Creatures the World Forgot*, recounts how the lady sent to a Paris boutique for her two simple costumes. But the locals can afford to be more blasé; they've seen it all before, when Huston shot part of *Moby Dick* around Fishguard. 'Oh yes, the film,' the man in the Georgian Tea Rooms says airily, 'I suppose it was quite interesting while they were here.' Sinclair may need his Celtic miracles.

DAVID WILSON

Towards Another Cinema

'I suppose you could say we face the future with guarded optimism,' says Nick Hart-Williams, founder with Peter Sainsbury of The Other Cinema project. The scheme grew from meetings in 1969 attended by film-makers like Losey, Lester, Albert Finney and Tony Garnett, film society representatives and other specialised film people united in the cause of some form of third circuit, or anything which would increase the showings of films blandly labelled 'uncommercial' by the trade. A working committee met during summer 1969, more people became interested, a film series began in early 1970 at The Place, and an exhibition/distribution organisation was formed on a non-profit basis.

'On the whole, we had a rough time at The Place—it was not available regularly enough to enable us to establish an audience pattern,' Hart-Williams says. 'Some French films did well, especially Godard and especially *Le Gai Savoir*; so did Straub's Bach film. But the festival of British independents was a disaster, and the only truly well-attended season was the Edinburgh Festival programme.' Their need to expand coincided with a stroke of luck: the old Odeon at King's Cross, which closed in August 1970, was bought by a business group including Leslie Elliot, one of The Other Cinema's trustees. The cinema was offered to Hart-Williams and his colleagues; and after a bit of rewiring and a paint job, it opened to the public in March this year with Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*, now almost a legendary title and unseen in Britain since its London Festival screening in 1966.

Warren Beatty and Carey Mackenzie in Robert Altman's 'McCabe and Mrs. Miller' (Former title: 'The Presbyterian Church Wager').

'We had been negotiating with Universal/Rank for six months, but were turned down because we did not have a big enough theatre. Now they agreed with, shall we say, less than complete confidence.' Fortunately, success was immediate: the theatre, with its 500 circle seats (the stalls are unavailable at the moment), was well attended during the eight-week run and they averaged £800 per week. Future programmes will include some of the 15 features and 16 shorts actually distributed by The Other Cinema, ranging from Mailer's *Maidstone* and Kramer's *Ice* to the British experimental feature *Mare's Tail*.

'We have also investigated those mysterious films everyone says have been put on the shelf—in some cases, I'm afraid, with good reason. We would certainly like to put on *The Rain People*, *The Conformist*, *China is Near*, *A Walk with Love and Death*, but there are problems: TV sales are involved, or companies are still negotiating for West End outlets. In the case of the Bellocchio, we can show it if *we* find an English subtitled print. M-G-M and Warner Bros. have approached us with possible titles and we would welcome other companies' suggestions.'

What about future expansion? 'In the autumn, we hope to open a 200-seater to be built under the Charing Cross arches. As far as the provinces are concerned, we would like to establish an alternative circuit by opening our own places and encouraging other people's projects. The Birmingham Arts Lab are now showing all the films we distribute and a branch of The Other Cinema recently opened in a Bristol church hall at the instigation of some keen art students. They, in fact, approached us and we hope others will follow.'

Mr. Hart-Williams agreed that it is now feasible to forecast a possible pattern of development, with The Other Cinema concentrating on political, social and experimental work, the BFI Regional Theatres making available a selection of 'mainstream' continental productions, and the local film societies continuing with classics and revivals. Obviously, they are bound to overlap in many areas but, given enthusiastic organisers and audiences and, of course, more money, a little revolution may be in sight.

JOHN GILLETT

After the Revolution...

Taking a deep breath after the disorders of 1970, the Oberhausen Festival again swung with the times, abolishing the international jury prizes, drastically reducing the number of short films screened, and grouping the selections by theme and category (cartoons, student films, Third World, etc.) rather than by country.

The event was strangely muted, with fewer visitors from abroad than previously, and a lack of spark and enthusiasm. Perversely, one began to miss those raucous, intolerant audiences of yesteryear, as short after short was unreeled to a polite spatter of applause and only the sparing whistle. But, as so often in the past, Oberhausen may be the prototype of festivals to come, with the emphasis on study and discussion rather than speeches, parties, and radical chic. The Kurzfilmtage receive no subsidy from Bonn, even in their seventeenth year, and the organisation, staffed mainly by volunteers, is spartan, dedicated, and defiant; the superb retrospective of American social documentaries of the Thirties reflected this mood in the latter part of the week. Earlier, a tribute to Canadian animation predictably confirmed Norman McLaren's eminence and extraordinarily precocious technique (much of the computerised animation of 1971 appeared dull beside *Hen Hop* and *Begone Dull Care*).

Last year's Oberhausen Festival revealed the talent of Frans Zwartjes; and his latest creation, *Through the Garden*, formed part of this year's opening programme. Here Zwartjes seems to break out, like a submariner surfacing, from his hermetic world of guilt, frustration and hypnosis, to conclude on a note of liberation as he and his family scamper round their orchard in speeded-up motion, as if discovering the cinema for the first time in Méliès' fashion.

The plums at Oberhausen this year were the cartoons, but the occasional documentary found its target. Andrzej Ryszard Trzos' *Examination* observes a diffident youth from the Polish countryside taking a diploma at art school, and has a knack for fastening on sensitive and expressive moments that recalls Forman or Skolimowski. Hannu and Erkki Peltomaa's *The Shadow of a City*, which had already won the Grand Prix at Tampere in February, studies the destitute alcoholics who shame the harbour streets of Helsinki, knitting interviews, commentary, and silent tableaux into a plea for social change. The usual committed formula of recent years—propaganda, situation, and finally (if they're lucky) people—was neatly reversed in this Finnish picture, giving it a dignity and resonance that outstayed the rantings of less thoughtful agit-prop movies.

Although Nikola Majdak's *Time of the Vampire* was inventive and amusing, the Zagreb Studios were not so prominent at this year's Oberhausen. A new talent asserted himself from Yugoslavia: Borislav Sajtinac. In *The Bride* and *Temptation*, Sajtinac hints at political morals in a style that has the same bold, sinister quality as Lenica's or Borowczyk's—men with potato-like heads scampering to their doom, a hag of a bride rejecting all her suitors in favour of a monstrous fowl. More orthodox and less obscure, Derek Phillips' *The Battle* describes the struggle for survival in the human body, saying in five minutes all that *Fantastic Voyage* failed to say in a hundred, and showing yet again the skill of this

Elaine May as director, on the set of her film 'A New Leaf'

British animator, seemingly still unrecognised at home. In much the same bright fashion, Raoul Servais' *To Speak or Not To Speak*, from Belgium, parodies political opinion sampling and then quickens into a study of Fascism.

Finally, a word of gratitude to Stig Björkman (who has just completed a full-length film on Bergman) for his hilarious comedy *In Other Words*, about a couple of radicals trying to run off leaflets on a duplicating machine, and finding that more haste means less speed.

PETER COWIE

The Salesman

The metamorphoses of the stars are always fascinating, but it's still a surprise to see Jerry Lewis as businessman, radiating high-voltage executive sincerity, super-salesman of 'good taste', and a man clearly not to be downed by a recalcitrant gadget or a runaway cliché. He's over here to promote the Jerry Lewis chain of automated mini-cinemas, now planning to extend its operations to Europe. Only twice, in an hour of brisk question-and-answer for the press, does an old-time Jerry Lewis face peep out: chin pulled in, coyly deprecating pout turned in half-profile. Mr. Lewis, the Billy Graham of family film-going and the clean and automated cinema, has put away childish things. Turning over the press handout in an idle moment, one sees that the Jerry Lewis home in Bel Air is the house once owned by the greatest family film-going man of them all, Louis B. Mayer.

Network Cinema Corporation, the company in which Jerry Lewis is a major shareholder, is apparently going great guns in the States—only fifteen cinemas actually operational, but 2,000 scheduled for opening in the course of the next few years. It's described, fervently, as a 'mom and dad' operation; and there is an affecting picture of mom and dad investing their savings in the acquisition of a cinema franchise and mastering the push-button controls of their new domain. The network helps with finance, prescribes standards of building and equipment, and books product into the cinemas. Varying in size from 100 to 350-seaters, these are planned to spread across the great American suburbia. How, someone asks, do mom and dad cope with the hooligan problem? No vandal, it seems, has yet set foot in a Jerry Lewis cinema.

The enterprise is designed to bring back family film-going, and the name on the marquee is to be a guarantee of the respectability of the product inside. Jerry Lewis cinemas will show films selected for them by the Jerry Lewis review board. Of course, no 'X' films—though it turns out that we are talking about the American 'X', a slightly different proposition from 'X' as the BBFC understands it. Would Mr. Lewis show a movie as violent as *The Wild Bunch* in his cinemas? No, he would not. The anti-trust laws of course make it impossible, even if it were otherwise feasible, for the network to engage in production on its own account; and Mr. Lewis complains of a certain shortage of suitable product. His own films, he ruefully comments, are rather beyond the network's present price range.

The cinemas are showing films on a second-run basis, a few weeks after first release, and at seat prices described as 'very reasonable', though to English ears they still sound slightly on the high side. As far as Europe is concerned, the network is preparing to 'clasp hands' with Europe's national economies. Mr. Lewis hasn't heard of Britain's Home Office regulations about cinema staffing, and the ratio of usherettes to customers, but favours the sincere approach to such pieces of administrative 'static'. But even family film-going has its hazards. Someone gently points out that *Love Story*, described by Jerry Lewis as 'the greatest thing that has happened to the cinema in years,' is by British censorship regulations only for the over-fourteens.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Cassettes on the Croisette

In April the Palais des Festivals in Cannes was the venue for V.I.D.C.A., the first international Video Cassette and Video Disc Programme and Equipment conference. Well over a thousand representatives of 461 companies were there, as well as journalists from all over the world, itself an indication that a new and valid industry had been born. Japanese electronics engineers communicated with English educationists, American advertising men with South African film producers, Swedish publishers with German recording companies, French TV producers with Spanish chemists, all babbling internationally or in English (by and large the language of the conference, despite the efforts of the French organisers) before the sparkling audio-visually programmed TV screens. But in this confusion of scepticism and enthusiasm some order was discernible. The commitments of the developers, the millions already sunk and to be made or lost, provided a solid base on which to speculate. And the actual presence of the new medium, there in constant action, threw a bridge between the disparity of creative, commercial and buccaneering interests.

The audio-visual cassette is, despite some conflict of opinion, a New Medium. As Mr. Elmer Wavering of Motorola Inc. put it: 'This is a highly decentralised, customised, personalised type of communications technology.' Its newness lies in its application, flexibility of usage and effect on the consumer. It advances the existing communications media technologically and applies them to the individual; it transforms television, for instance, into a means to another medium, so that the TV set becomes another machine like a typewriter. The new medium constitutes a very real threat to its technological sires; and it has logically attracted the financial interests of the industries and professions it most threatens—TV, film, sound recording companies.

McLuhan is partly wrong when he says that this development is yet another stage in the revolution away from the printed word. The mental processes involved in using cassettes are in many ways closer to those of reading than to those of

Dustin Hoffman in Sam Peckinpah's 'The Straw Dogs', filmed this spring on Cornish locations and at Twickenham

sitting-watching-hearing in front of a cinema or TV screen. Scanning, editing, stop-starting, speed control, choice, library potential; and most important of all, home market penetration and distribution outlets, are the domain of yet another industry which is committing itself in a big way to cassettes: publishing.

Publishers seem to have reached saturation point in the marketing of their conventional product. The last decade has seen them support their material with the visual—the illustrated book. But publishers cannot make the literate world read more when there is so much competition for leisure and instruction time: they either shrink, or add sound and motion. As Lukas Bonnier, president of the Swedish Bonnier magazine group, put it, whether publishers realise it or not they are in the communications business. They cater to individual tastes, are sensitive to changes of mood, their fields of specialisation are wide, and they have exceptional home and educational market penetration on an international scale.

Education is the first big consumer market for the new product. The Cannes conference was vociferously attended by American teachers, amusingly addressed by Mr. Leslie Ryder of I.L.E.A., reasoned to by Professor Robert Lefranc of L'Ecole Normale Supérieure, and regaled by educational cassette producers. The teaching profession feels threatened by the advent of yet another first-aid to teaching. The inevitable redundancy fear, with futurologists predicting the dehumanisation of instruction and the mechanised student. Futurological nonsense, by and large: the advantage of the audio-visual cassette is that it will be able to reach the 66 per cent of the world which is illiterate. This majority could well become McLuhan's audio-visually educated but illiterate adults of the future.

The two main problems besetting the nascent industry are the standardisation of the various soft and hardware systems, and the question of copyright. The magnetic systems are attractive to hardware producers and to consumers because of their recording and re-recording facilities. The photographic film, audio disc and holographic systems are more attractive to software producers, because they do not have these facilities and thus lessen the risk of piracy and the concomitant problems of copyright infringement. Professor Mel Nimmer of U.C.L.A. Law School surmised that the various systems might eventually all have to be recognised legally as moving pictures, and thus subject to motion picture copyright. At the moment there is little control over the magnetic tape systems. A loophole suggested was that all tape material be put on to photographic film and then back on to tape as necessary. Either test cases will solve these problems, or the setting up of a body to settle the legal questions on an international basis. And the conference may have initiated such a convening.

Standardisation may also not be an insurmountable problem. The Japanese have rationalised their systems for the home market; they may be the pace-setters. The United States, by dint of its formidable marketing strength, may be able to enforce one of its winning systems. Europe for the time being lags behind, which may be a good thing. Europe has one advantage over these two commercial electronics giants: it has a formidable administrative bureaucracy operating internationally. Were publishers to join forces with European television networks and electronics manufacturers and seek shelter under the politically open umbrella of an organisation like the Council of Europe, we might be able to settle both the standardisation and the copyright problems, and thus be the first to exploit this internationally oriented industry.

HEATHER CREMONESI

John Randolph Continues

John Randolph is riding a new wave of prosperity, having recently played a large, juicy role as Cyrus McNutt, the larcenous partner of Hume Cronyn in Joseph L. Mankiewicz' *There Was a Crooked Man*, and a crucial scene as Elliott Gould's estranged father in Jules Feiffer's *Little Murders*, the first film directed by Alan Arkin. Yet more lucrative are his frequent appearances on many of the major television dramatic series. By his own ironic designation he is a 'new face' in Hollywood (although a Broadway actor for 35 years), due in large measure to his fifteen solid years on the blacklist since the Joe McCarthy years of intimidation.

His political liberalism began with anti-Franco rallies during the Spanish Civil War, and embraced support, by means of angry telegrams and picketing, for the jailed Hollywood Ten and the first crop of blacklisted actors in Hollywood. Along with Eli Wallach, Lee Grant and others, he was instrumental in the formation of a committee which managed to insert a clause in the Actors Equity charter which effectively blocked the use of blacklisting in the New York theatre, thus securing his own salvation as an actor and, in time, providing a haven for many of the Hollywood blacklisted, who were able to return to work on the stage.

'The exact day of my own blacklisting,' he recalls, 'occurred in 1951, during a rehearsal of a live television show for Sidney Lumet, in which I played opposite Anthony Quinn. Sidney, who despised the blacklist, had to tell me that the show's sponsor had telephoned the network to say that I was a Red and must be fired. Ultimately, I completed that show, but I was told, to my face, that my career as a television actor was ended. Any chance of work in films, I knew, was out of the question.'

Years of intense hard work in the theatre followed, often threadbare years, and acceptance of any role offered, including an embarrassing three-year stint in the tiny part of Theodore Bikel's butler in the Broadway musical *The Sound of Music*. During this time Randolph endured an inevitable appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee. He openly challenged the right of this committee to exist, and invoked the First and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution which, on paper, guarantee individual rights to political and personal freedom.

'Finally, in 1961, John Frankenheimer, a very young director whom I had known from television work, offered to screen-test me for a role in *The Young Savages* with Burt Lancaster. We filmed the test and he said, 'John, all of us young directors loathe this blacklist. I promise you a definite yes-or-no answer about this part. You'll get more than just silence.' I went home and waited, and there was silence, a very long silence. Some months later I bumped into Frankenheimer when we were both invited to Theo Bikel's Passover Seder. He stared into my face and his eyes filled with tears. He bolted, and ran out of the apartment. Johnny could not abide surrendering to the demands of the blacklist, an irresistible force.'

The next five years brought significant changes: Randolph had begun to work again in New York television and Frankenheimer had achieved recognition and power as a major American film-maker. When casting *Seconds* for Paramount, he required a strong actor whose face was not well known, to portray the middle-aged banker who is metamorphosed into Rock Hudson in the film; and he remembered Randolph. Another screen test was arranged and John Randolph, whose total film experience to then had been one day's work each in *Naked City* and *Fourteen Hours*, went on to give a memorable performance as a bored American, weary to death of his empty comforts. 'It was somewhat unnerving,' says Randolph, 'to hear, at the age of fifty, "Who is that actor, and where has he been?"'

Randolph went on to roles as Tony Perkins' parole officer in Noel Black's *Pretty Poison*; in *Number One*, with Charlton Heston; *Gaily Gaily* (English title: *Chicago, Chicago*), and several others. He is now firmly entrenched as a fixture in the studios of Hollywood. He was more than proud to tell me that he had been hired to replace an actor in *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* and 'punch up' the role, receiving 5,000 dollars for one week's work. 'Having been denied all of this for so many long years, I can't work enough in film. Some day I'd like to land another role as fine as the one I had in *Seconds*, and I would work for Joe Mankiewicz or Julie Dassin on a moment's notice. But, mainly, I want to go on working for as long as it lasts. I love film and I still feel new to it, and excited by it, as if I were a young man in a new profession. Film is very rewarding and, in all honesty, I can't help feeling that I am entitled to those rewards.'

ROBERT FREY

Jennifer Kendal in James Ivory's 'Bombay Talkie'

FESTIVALS 1971

CANNES

Cannes this year reached its 25th anniversary, and Michèle Morgan reigned over the Jury—fair tribute to the star who in 1946 took the acting prize for *La Symphonie Pastorale*. The second twenty-five years may be the hardest; but if the cinema is still around in 1996 there seems no reason to think Cannes won't be there too. It's still the festival with the strongest power of survival through sheer absorption; and with screenings now running eighteen hours a day (there's a lull between two and eight in the morning, but one feels someone, somewhere, must be getting ready to move in on it) the festival's only frontier seems to be the endurance of its projectionists. Admittedly, dour old *Symphonie Pastorale* might have acquired a certain sparkle by comparison with a few of the new films in competition—films old before their time, or that were never young, and ranging all the way from a churning Spanish life of Goya to the latest depressed bulletin from the New York drug front, the well-titled **Panic in Needle Park.** Admittedly, the festival shorts look so familiar that it's hard to believe that for some of them it isn't the twenty-fifth time around. Cannes' problem is still to reconcile what is going on in the main auditorium, where every film can't be a **Go-Between** or a **Death in Venice** (interesting, too, that both these conspicuously well-made pictures look back, through the richest detail, to corruption in high Edwardian summer), with the livelier lucky dip of the Directors' Fortnight. Here there's also uncertainty. Handheld reports of student harangue and Godardian slogans have surely taken us about as far as they can; pornography is no sensation. ('Porno is still mild and family-oriented,' announces one charming advertisement: so much for that.) The cinema has absorbed its narrative experiments of the last decade, the devices of time and structure, and there is little noticeably new in that direction; the innovations of the next few years seem likelier to be in areas outside narrative.

Meanwhile, to the masters. Reporting on Cannes four years ago, I see John Russell Taylor wrote of *Mouchette* that it made everything else in the festival look a little flashy. Monotonously, one could say the same of **Quatre Nuits d'un Rêveur,** which opened the Directors' Fortnight in magisterial style, and which confronts one, more compellingly perhaps than any Bresson film since *Balthazar*, with the critical mystery of that limpidly enigmatic style. A man pushes a lift button, and a light flashes: a gesture of no special significance to the character, or to the film's meaning. And yet no interruption, short of the ceiling falling about one's ears, could distract attention from that little illuminated panel. Why? How? Apart from Bresson's supreme paring-away, his awareness of essence, one can only posit some sort of telepathic communication, transmitting the intensity of the director's concentration. The object is not a symbol, a clue, a 'significant' detail, but simply a conductor for the director's will.

In *Quatre Nuits*, Bresson is again filming Dostoievsky—the script is based on *White Nights*, which some years ago tempted Visconti into a very different style of interpretation. But the bridge where the girl waits for her lover is now the Pont Neuf, with the cars streaming by; the down-and-outs have become nomad hippies; the young dreamer is a secretive painter, who turns his canvases to the wall when visitors appear, and confides a solitary's romantic fancies to a tape-recorder. Visconti and Maria Schell made the girl herself a wistful dreamer, haunting her own bridge of sighs. Bresson gives her the implacable obstinacy, or pig-headed saintliness, common to all his heroines, so that she seems enclosed on a little island of conviction, towards which the young painter builds a causeway out of his own willed romanticism. As in *Une Femme Douce*, Bresson crystallises the nineteenth century story within its incongruously perfect setting—the drug store, the cars, the visit to the cinema, with a gangster death scene which emerges not as parody but as an extraordinary intimation from some never to be made Bressonian thriller. And in a breathtaking shot, a *bateau mouche* glides beneath the bridge, all lights and glass, mysteriously glowing,

Oshima's 'The Ceremony', Makavejev's 'W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism', Roeg's 'Walkabout'.

reality transmuted into a futuristic vision, the stuff that dreams are made of.

The Bresson film is a severe and deeply touching masterpiece; Bresson's god's eye view is still subject to divine discontents. He films like a father, Nagisa Oshima like a worried son. Oshima is a film-maker whom I suspect one will always find baffling: to get out of his work anything like what the director puts in, one possibly needs a bred-in-the-bone awareness of the Japanese mentality, a sense of the pressures of an alien past. We are looking at the Oshima world through the wrong end a of telescope, at best intellectualising and second-guessing. But **The Ceremony**, also in the Directors' Fortnight, conveys an extraordinary concentration of force. It's a post-war Japanese family saga, much of it filmed Ozu-style by a camera squatting formally with the characters at knee-level, centred on the funerals and weddings which bring the clan ceremonially together. There's a coldly domineering grandfather; suggestions of incest; allusions to the kind of neurotic power-tensions in the Japanese soul which produce such bizarre and ominous episodes as the suicide of Mishima. 'What relation,' asks Oshima, 'is there between the economic and political realities of Japan today and the Japanese people's attraction to death and their sensitivity to suicide?' By the end of the film, three of the four characters from the younger generation are dead, two by their own hands, and the survivor has reverted to a characteristic Oshima memory of childhood. Ozu, the traditionalist, suggested that the Japanese live lives of quiet desperation; Oshima, a visceral intellectual, shows hysteria beating against formality—and erupting in a scene of Jacobean extravagance, when a wedding without a bride turns into a wake for a murdered wedding guest, and the hero hurls the bandage-swathed corpse from its coffin and lies down in its place, an aghast rebel. Unassailable, calm as an iceberg, his grandmother looks on.

In the West, the victory long ago went to youth, and **Taking Off**, Milos Forman's first American film, is a view of the defeated, the soft and silly and incapable middle-aged, trying to come to terms with their runaway children. American critics have accused Forman, like Antonioni before him, of a one-sided view. Of course; Forman is no more setting out to document America than Antonioni was, and it's remarkable how he and his cameraman, Miroslav Ondricek, have assimilated the most American settings, motel and suburban house and hotel ballroom, to their own more familiar Czech-provincial landscape. This is less an American film than a Forman film made in America; watchful, funny, not necessarily kind to the vulnerabilities it exposes as the perplexed parents (Buck Henry and Lynn Carlin) play hunt-the-daughter and detour into their own follies. There is a hilarious scene in which a convention of abandoned parents experiment with their children's drugs, an absurdity of dissolving gentility, joints and creaking joints; and a magical moment, one of those sudden flashes from a Forman dream, when the disappearing daughter runs away again, and the parents follow her out of their stuffy flat into a green dawn, mysterious, foreign, haunted by possibility.

Milos Forman's 'Taking Off'

Bo Widerberg's **Joe Hill**, another European exploration of America, begins with a suggestion of the same splendid freshness: the young Swedish immigrant moving away from dusty New York, out into the great continent. Widerberg, one feels, must have been brought up on the American social novelists, from Dos Passos upwards or downwards; the alluring, un-European romance of space and mobility, hitting the road, riding the rails, sitting out at night on city fire-escapes. But apart from Thommy Berggren's invigorating performance, the film develops disappointingly, a picaresque but increasingly generalised biography of the labour song-writer and I.W.W. organiser. The Widerberg mixture—socialism through joy; the innocence of the poor and the implacability of the powerful—may carry one along. Or it may suggest its own form of retreat. Widerberg says that he didn't want to make a trial movie; but his version of how Joe Hill came to be tried for murder, with its fictional tale of a long-lost love from the fire-escape days and a jealous Italian opera singer, is vague to a point which suggests a kind of arrogance in the director, a belief that he can prove a case by an emotional tone.

The Russians, who still like to bring out their blockbusters for festivals, loomed stolidly with Alov and Naumov's **The Flight**: intriguing for its subject matter (the White Russians' defeat and exile, with the more sympathetic characters duly heading back at last for their forgiving homeland), but stylistically too heavy by half. Kozintsev's **King Lear**, shown at a fringe screening, is also on the big Soviet scale; and after his intent and gripping *Hamlet*, a disappointment. This is a Baltic *Lear*, of huge walled fortresses, moaning peasants, treks across parched, cracked wastelands like inland seas; a Northern winter's tale, scaled to its sad landscape, though Kozintsev contrives some of those urgent, ominous entrances that were a feature of his *Hamlet*. Part of the problem, perhaps, is that he lets his Lear (Yuri Jarvet) start out too crazed, an old man abdicating his grip on the world along with his kingdom. In the context of a dotard Lear, Edmund and his plottings are thrown off balance. But one hopes someone brings the film to London for a second look: if the play defeats Kozintsev, some of his detail, like Lear's first second-childhood entrance, with the Fool tucked under his cloak, demands attention.

I can't remember a festival when so many films (in the main auditorium, at least) looked backward in time: Joe Hill, Sacco and Vanzetti, White Russian exiles, Edwardian Venice: an antic, crazed allegory (**Pindorama**) from Brazil; a blood-stained Japanese film about a nineteenth century painter; Michel Deville's **Raphael ou le Débauche**, enervated costume prettiness about a non-affair between a rake and a good woman. Even Louis Malle's **Le Souffle au Coeur** is distanced to the time of Dien Bien Phu; and Karoly Makk's **Love**, a touching but slightly frail and dejected tale of a dying old lady, her staunch daughter-in-law, and her political prisoner son, looks back to Budapest, 1953. 'The past is a foreign country . . .' But the film burrowing furthest into a past, private world, remote and hermetically sealed, was predictably Walerian Borowczyk's **Blanche**, shown out of festival. This is almost *Goto* again, with the prison-island replaced by a medieval castle, turrets lost in a green shade, while inside a monkey scuttles and gapes, and every dark arras hides a lurking, prying priest. Aged lord (Michel Simon) and young wife, a wimpled ninny to drive everyone mad; knight and page-boy; chain-mail and monks' habits. One tires of repetitive anti-clerical jibes, though Borowczyk manages a pretty one, when a lily is snatched from a pale medieval hand as more fitting for the altar. But some of this wayward film's imagery is stunning, like a shot in which a doorway is suddenly filled by men in armour, dark as night.

Finally, Nicolas Roeg's **Walkabout**, a cameraman's film in which the phrase isn't an insult, because Roeg is not merely composing prettiness: the camera is the

eye and mind and consciousness of the film. The story is terribly simple and, in consequence, terribly difficult: two children, adrift in the Australian outback after their father's insane suicide, are befriended by an aborigine boy, discover the noble savagery and innocence of the desert, and are finally brought back to shackling civilisation. Edward Bond's dialogue is (correctly) minimal; Jenny Agutter, again correctly, is the spirit of Knightsbridge in the wilderness. Everything depends on Roeg's eye—the sudden whipping shock of the father's mad sniping at his children; the two figures stumping along the desert ridges in their school uniforms; the aborigine's first appearance, a marvellous, whirling hunter; the continuing prehistoric life of the desert. After the Borgesian sophistication of *Performance* (no doubt Donald Cammell's contribution) *Walkabout* is engagingly primitive; though, maybe revealingly, it's also about an encounter between worlds apart, and it also ends on a ritualised willing of death. Roeg looks the most hopeful British prospect to emerge since John Boorman; and for rather the same reasons. They both have a sense of cinematic terrain, the landscapes which absorb and justify and define their characters: their movies move.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

First, the Louis Malle film, **The Heart Murmur.** Presented in competition, it apparently upset the Jury so much by its 'immorality' that it got nothing when the prizes were handed out. And yet it seems to me to be Malle's best film since, well, since *Les Amants* really. Like that film, it is set in Dijon; the time is 1954, the year of Dien Bien Phu, and Malle has accompanied his story of a boy passing through adolescence with a picture of post-war French life. The whole film is shot very much in the manner of the period. Strangely enough, Malle has succeeded in almost completely ignoring the developments in cinematographic language of the last twenty years, yet without falling into the trap of pastiche. His success comes largely from the script, which for the first time he wrote himself, and from his direction of the actors. Lea Massari is excellent as the Italian girl who married a middle-class French gynaecologist but has never accepted bourgeois provincial life. Her youngest son, Renzo, takes after her: he too is the odd one out, and not unnaturally their relationship is very close.

When a case of scarlet fever leaves him with a heart murmur, he is packed off with his mother to a spa. There, in the artificial society of an isolated hotel, the inevitable happens, and Renzo lives out for one night what so many others dream of all their lives: he actually sleeps with his mother (this, of course, is what caused the scandal). But it is not the main point of the film; it is only part of the process of Renzo's coming of age, which Malle has portrayed more fully and more exactly than one has ever seen before on the screen. There is still a place for psychological realism in the cinema, provided it is done with as much honesty, skill, and above all wit, as Malle has displayed here. For *Le Souffle au Coeur* is also a very funny film. Malle can see that however tormented young Renzo is by the problems of adolescence, seen objectively, these torments are also very funny. It is this double vision, both subjective and objective, which makes the film so successful.

Family Life, directed by Krzysztof Zanussi, is also an 'old-fashioned' film in its technique; but the point is that, as in the Malle film, that technique is perfectly appropriate to the subject matter, which could be described as an updated socialist version of *The Cherry Orchard.* A young man from an upper middle-class family has gone to Warsaw and become an engineer and a worthy member of socialist society. A telegram calls him home to the crumbling world he had left behind—the almost deserted workshop of his ex-industrialist father and his drunken sister. Mother has disappeared, gone off to America, and father, daughter and aunt are living on the crumbs of the past.

The confrontation of young Wit with his family is heightened by the fact that he doesn't come to the house alone. He is accompanied by his best friend, a young man of peasant stock, who is in even greater contrast to these dregs of bourgeois pre-war life than Wit himself. And in fact, by the end of the twenty-four hours of their stay, Wit has come to a realisation that he cannot completely escape his past: he is his father's son, for better or for worse. A film with such a limited scope depends very much on its actors, and Zanussi directs them with a skill and subtlety that are astonishing. I never saw his first film, *Crystal Structure*, but it would seem that he is someone to be reckoned with.

Bo Widerberg's **Joe Hill** was variously received; in spite of its weaknesses—overly episodic and perhaps too sentimental—I thought it not unworthy of the director of *Adalen 31*. Curiously enough, its theme was very similar to that of Makavejev's **WR: Mysteries of the Organism,** which was perhaps the greatest success of the Directors' Fortnight. Widerberg's Joe Hill is seeking a socialism which will bring both bread and roses; Makavejev's film is an attempt to sexualise socialism. For the W.R. of his title stands not only for World Revolution but for Wilhelm Reich, the philosopher of the orgone box. Both films were partly made in America, Widerberg's for location shooting, Makavejev's for 'comparative material'. He daringly intercuts orgasmic scenes of life in New York today with shots from old Stalinist films in an attempt to show that only more and better orgasms can put socialism back on the Leninist road.

Louis Malle's 'Le Souffle au Coeur'

I for one found the film more than somewhat opportunistic, and not a little vulgar. It is all very well for Makavejev to illustrate Reich's equation of authoritarian systems with pornography, but it seems to me that he hasn't avoided something worse than pornography, i.e. prurience. In spite of all the exposed organs and sexual grapplings, no one in the film ever actually achieves an orgasm, which not only cuts against the message of Reich but also makes the film so titillatingly obscene. This is, I must emphasise again, a strictly minority report; everyone else thought that the film was great.

It is true that Makavejev neatly handles the free essay form, cleverly linking reportage with acted scenes. But along these lines Werner Herzog's **Fata Morgana,** also storyless, seemed to me both more important and more successful. *Fata Morgana* could be described as a documentary on the Sahara: all the sequences were shot there—whether in the desert itself or in the towns and oases. But the accompanying narration (mostly an eighteenth century Indian account of the creation of the world) clued us in to the fact that this is Herzog's version of Genesis—and also of the Apocalypse—an abstract parable of the life of man on earth. It could have been ghastly, but it isn't, mostly because this abstract-sounding film is very concrete: the reality of those sand dunes littered with the wreckage of aircraft, those vast spaces with nothing as far as the eye can see, nothing except the refuse of what we call civilisation, those heat-haze mirages from which mysterious objects (which we eventually discover to be Land-Rovers) slowly emerge like some early form of life from the primitive slime.

Someone once wrote that it was not surprising that the three great monotheistic religions all came out of the desert, and it is something of that mystery of the unhidden and the unnameable that Herzog has so successfully evoked in his *Fata Morgana.* Another German director, R. W. Fassbinder, gave us his first truly workable film, **Recruits in Ingolstadt.** Based on a play of the Twenties by one Marie Luise Fleisser (who had the distinction of having been a great influence on Brecht), this tale of a provincial garrison town with its soldiers and servant girls was given epic proportions by Fassbinder's divorcing of it from time: the girls wear mini-skirts, but the uniforms are a curious mixture of today and yesterday, with Nazi insignia on the caps.

The dialogue, touching in its very banality, is spoken in a kind of parody of theatrical high style which paradoxically makes it both funny and extremely moving. In his earlier films Fassbinder seemed too much under the influence of Godard and Straub. Here he has liberated himself, and the result is a film which, along with the Herzog, gives one renewed hope for the German cinema.

RICHARD ROUD

TICKET TO RIDE?

Graham Cadwallader

There were some predictable prizewinners at the 5th National Student Film Festival in New York last year. They had titles like *Silent Majority*, a political satire set in MacArthur Park in Los Angeles; *Chicago*, a documentary about the 1968 Democratic Convention; *The Sixth Day*, which deals with the aftermath of the Kent State killings; *Inciting to Riot*, *Purple Heart* and *Selective Service System*. These were the year's decorated veterans of the radical rhetoric which now distinguishes, even dominates the tone of American student films. They naturally—for student film always reflects tendencies in the commercial cinema—had their counterparts in *The Strawberry Statement*, *Getting Straight*, *Alice's Restaurant*.

Why then the paucity of Marxist, Maoist or what-have-you haranguing in the work of English film students in the three major London film schools over the last few years? Where are the hand-held newsreels of South African demonstrations or the one-take Godardian set-pieces of ideological cut and thrust? There are a few early exceptions. Keith Judge's *Wizzblam* (Royal College of Art film department, 1967) is one; another, more recent, is *Birthday* (London Film School), a portentous series of contrasting shots of technological progress and starvation as a girl recalls meeting the father of her baby on a CND march—a film which has been in constant demand in America. But you won't find much else, although in fairness Robert Dunbar of the London Film School believes that the political student film is now 'well on its way'. (Current LFS productions include *Docks*, a left-wing examination of industrial dispute in the London Docks; *Handy Dandy*, about a South African ex-political prisoner arriving in England; and *The Ballad of Pat Rooney*, about a child killed in Northern Ireland.) The apparent apathy may partly be explained by the fact that English students since 1964 have not suffered the experiences of their American contemporaries at first hand. There has also been an ubiquitous disinclination to translate the all-pervasive left-wing stance in the film schools into film; it is difficult to get up much enthusiasm for making movies about that which is taken for granted. I am not of course suggesting either that English work is insular or that its lack of political commitment is reprehensible.

The main models for English student film-makers have rarely been political. Nor, by the way, does the hard-core underground have the widespread influence one might have expected, although the experiments of Warhol, Emshwiller, Nelson, Dwoskin and the rest are followed with interest. Their exemplars are better-established traditions of English cinema and television—documentary, humour, animation, The Wednesday Play, even (alas) Pathé Pictorial and *The Power Game*. A misleadingly encouraging mark of the bulk of student films undertaken in the last few years is their enormous scope.

Take documentary—I quote at random from official lists of films now available for distribution. 'Documentary on the process of ageing.' 'A folk singing group.' 'Disposal of human remains—cremation or burial?' 'An animated documentary on the digestive tract.' 'Life in a remote village in the West Country.' 'Meths drinkers in the East End of London.' Student models range from Humphrey Jennings through Jean Rouch to *24 Hours* or *World in Action*. It is relatively easy for a student to turn in a good piece of documentary work, even allowing for tricky locations and 'take-us-as-you-find-us' casts. At the RCA television and cinema are regarded as inseparable media, and many students there appear especially to admire directors like Loach, Peter Watkins, or Billington, who went through the TV mill before establishing themselves in the feature film. These, not the remote planets of a Hitchcock or a Godard, are goals to which students can aspire. Many of them indeed feel disenchantment with the feature film and dissatisfaction that the vagaries of American finance should so totally control the British film industry. They even see the current financial crisis as a possible harbinger of a modest but

Above: Southend pier location for Bill Douglas' 'Come Dancing' (LFS)

indigenous English cinema. A well-made 'slice of life' is also regarded as a ticket to the industry, as good a guarantee as one will get of continued employment after the halcyon student days—an often expressed cause of anxiety.

Aves Room, by Eli Cohen of the LFS, is one of the better documentaries around, a moving and unsentimental study of old people set in Toynbee Hall. Nonagenarian ladies reminisce to the catchy sound of barrel-organ music-hall hits from the Twenties, clap their hands and dance to 'Dr. Zhivago', even can-can. Gruesome infectiousness and pathos are a tightrope path to walk; Cohen doesn't fall off once. The RCA showpiece is *Tyne Main*, by Philip Trevelyan, a day in the life of a riverside pub, The Ship, in Newcastle. This is a sociological piece akin to the *Saturday Night and Sunday Mornings* of the early Sixties. It is an atmospheric study of bridges, beer glasses, gnarled faces concentrating on dominoes, beehive hairdos vying with Tony Curtis quiffs, singsongs, dancing and drunkenness. It vividly captures the sounds of dogs, seagulls, hooters and expectoration; were it ten minutes shorter it would be very good. A good documentary from the Polytechnic of Central London is David Smith's *Light*—a well-composed abstract of the industrial manufacture of light. To the accompaniment of a classical guitar, light bulbs move in and out of mechanical slots with the delicate precision of dancers in a chaconne. This film won first prize in the documentary section of the University of Southampton Festival, Motion '70.

'Based on a short story by XYZ.' A great deal of student film depends on borrowed ideas, poems, plays. It would be hypercritical, however, to imply that many students are devoid of ideas of their own. Far better to make a reasonable half-hour adaptation of something solid than an over-extended film of a tenuous script of one's own invention. Again it is an Establishment which supplies most of the inspiration, this time the Penguin Modern Classics pantheon of Great Writers. 'Adaptation from Jean-Paul Sartre.' '*The Morning After the Night Before*, after Dorothy Parker.' '*Franny*, from the J. D. Salinger short story.' 'A failed relationship, based on a Lawrence poem.' 'An adaptation of Poe.'

Sometimes the results are atrocious, yet occasionally a good film emerges which does justice to the original *and* stands on its own merits. The best I saw came from Nigel Trow at the Birmingham College of Art—a version of Colette's *Ripening Seed*, the novel of adolescent love. As yet undubbed, the film recalls vintage silent screen moments with its sensitive study of motion—rippling seas, trees bending in the wind, sheep meandering down a country lane, the expressiveness of a sudden petulant toss of the head. It is curious how often fictional films not founded on originals go on too long. The reservation applies in different measure to two new scripts which became Bill Douglas' *Come Dancing* (LFS 1970) and Richard Stanley's *The Matchseller* (RCA 1968). The first has considerable feeling for the homosexual encounter it portrays; the second, about a bride meeting her future husband at a fair, indulges with some bravura in fantasy and green filters. Like *Tyne Main* they could have done with ruthless editing. One of the wholly commendable pieces of original fiction around is *Sunday Saturnalia* (LFS 1968), a witty and blasphemous look at seduction in the Naughty Nineties. This film could conversely have lasted longer.

The rich English tradition of loony comedy has unsurprisingly inspired a massive body of student film in London. The epithets which have come to be associated almost automatically with the names of Richard Lester, the Goons, Richard Williams—'zany', 'anarchic', 'mercurial'—have appeared more *sympathique* to students than the vocabulary of revolution. In practical terms students find it easy to produce their own version of *The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film*—all you need is a field and a boxing glove, or other equally accessible props. Richard Stanley's *Lone Ranger* (RCA 1967) is an occasionally very funny film about a student, Beaky, and his attempts to *épater le bourgeois* of London. Amid crowded streets (with some well-judged intercut shots of vacant gawps or knowing giggles) he performs a series of lunatic antics—standing on his hands, writhing on the pavement to the fearsome zip of imaginary arrows, having epileptic fits, doing a Brando, a Belmondo, a King Kong, a Mario Lanza, a Dalek in bewildering succession. His rubbery physiognomy helps. A good entry from the LFS for the same stakes is Rodney Carr Smith's *Yolk* (1970), in which a student risks his life carrying an egg and spoon across a busy motorway only to be presented with an ostrich egg on an outsize spoon. Finally he sits on a chair in the middle of the road. An interspersed gallery of grotesque drawings reinforces this 'cinema of the absurd' message; the metaphor for Life is amusingly drawn out.

In the same vein is the work from John Beech, Mark Ezra, Roger Giddings and Peter Bradley, a group at the Polytechnic who once went under the suitably rude name of The Raspberry Brothers. Their *Mummy Mummy*, which Richard Roud mentioned in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND, is a disturbing piece of black comedy reminiscent more of Joe Orton than of N. F. Simpson. Beech, his hair shaven and his beanpole frame crammed into a school uniform twelve sizes too small, plays a subnormal pervert with a passing resemblance to the poor pinheads of *Freaks*. Amid hideous sniggering and electronically distorted shriekings of 'Mummy Mummy' he bestows lascivious kisses on his sinister mother and terrifies passers-by with his war toys. He inveigles an unsuspecting girl friend—whose face is entirely covered with hair, like some random image from Magritte—into his semi-detached, makes slobbering pinches at her in lieu of courtship, and next morning adds her to his Bluebeard's collection of murdered ladies upstairs. Mummy plays 'this little piggy' with him and the pair wriggle in ecstasy. The film cost £40.

The group have developed a unique style. Stuttering jump cuts, huge facial close-ups and a perpetual use of wide angle lenses for maximum distortion are their stock in trade. The idiosyncrasies are on view again in the later *The Cameraman*, a less successful parody of the frenzied model photography of *Blow-Up*, and also in a current film about which their own synopsis must speak. '*Keep Ceaseless Watch on the Colorado Beetle*—a sort of Buster Orton film, in which two homosexual youths find that they enjoy stuffing young ladies down lavatories. Meanwhile another youth joins the police and hunts them down.' Other activities of this prolific brotherhood include a spoof Western provisionally entitled *Lord Roger Giddings and the Transvestite Kid*, which they have been trying to induce Richard Lester to make with them, and *Miss Jennifer Jones*, again in current production, the synopsis of which reads: 'A millionaire recluse enacts the fantasies instilled in him by the TV 'Jennifer Jones' Show upon his one-legged Negro slave Long John Frothdrop, his pet penguin and his pantomime cow. Frothdrop wreaks his revenge by conjuring up the real Jennifer Jones and chaos ensues. A black comedy demonstrating the evils of losing control of one's

Eli Cohen's 'Aves Room' (LFS)

environment.' Then they have almost finished a new *Seventh Seal*, in which the characters take isolated lines from Bergman and treat them in Lester style. Revised version sample: when the knight knocks over the chessboard, both he and Death forget the positions of the pieces. 'Ask the continuity girl,' Death says.

Yet a longer Raspberry Brothers film, a travelogue made for the NUS last summer, has its longueurs. Divorced from the wayward content of their own scripts, the form loses some of its freshness. Amusing ideas are still on parade, like the shot of skiers carrying an injured companion home as a trophy like a slaughtered grizzly bear, hanging upside down from a pole. Yet the excursion into real places like Rome or Switzerland and real holiday events shows the limitations of their essentially surreal approach to film, and they are forced to have recourse to stock lampooning of holiday complainers, culture fiends, holiday romances, mountain climbers. Fortunately for them, however, they have refused to be trapped into slavishness by the method which has so far been their unique selling proposition. Mark Ezra for instance has essayed the semi-political documentary in his first-rate *Hitler Couldn't Have Bombed Us Out*. The film was commissioned in conjunction with the Camden Community for Race Relations, who have been showing it to police classes and race relations workers. It deals with the urban squalor and overcrowding which exacerbates tension between whites and West Indians and provides the raw material for Powellism. The interviews are a mixed bag; amid the general indifference shown towards the questioner, a distinct shock is administered by a raucous Cockney woman holding up a huge rat, who unexpectedly asks 'Can I put it down now?' Ezra is also working on a film about bowling alleys, while Beech is assisting on a Teddy Boy documentary.

Roger Giddings in 'Keep Ceaseless Watch on the Colorado Beetle' (PCL)

'Miss Jennifer Jones' (PCL)

Richard Stanley's 'Lone Ranger' (RCA)

It would be reassuring to think that all film school students could similarly drop their 'own thing' tomorrow and try a fresh angle. In a sense they *do* live in a beehive of experiment, a creative and diverse environment. So why is so much of their output so bad, marred by portentousness, prolixity or bathos? Again and again slight ideas which might make a pretty sixty-second spot are dragged out over half an hour, often with a polish which merely emphasises their glaring emptiness. Film after film is a carbon copy of flatulent TV soap opera, an *un*intentional parody of lesser full supporting features and bad B films. One may make every excuse for early infelicities in lighting, frame composition, editing; or for lack of money, crew, time, on occasion of official cooperation. Indeed it's easier to disregard these ancillary faults than the misplaced technical expertise. But real lack of film ideas on any level is a different matter.

What should the function of film schools be, and how do students view their time there? Are the schools to turn out competent focus-pullers and editors or the potential *auteurs* of the Seventies and Eighties? Colin Young, director of the new National Film School, is reported to believe that in an ideal situation the TV and cinema industries should provide the technicians. He believes that students should and do find mastering the physical processes of film-making simple, and that they should give far more attention to the production of a good cinematic treatment before money is spent on what he considers the flashy trappings of 35 mm. and wide screen. He is also associated with the controversial view that every student film could initially be shot on Super 8.

Hopefully, this puncturing of the preciousness and pretension of certain kinds of student film would bring about the ideal, the ever-humming beehive where low-budget quickies were shot every *week*, not every term. The situation is a miniature analogy, in fact, of the choice between the virility of quickie Hollywood gangster or musical productions and the bombast of the colossal super-production. It would certainly be sad if students spent their three years learning the techniques of the well-made film only to find them irrelevant, overtaken and made obsolete by new methods of directing. Is it in acknowledgment of this pitfall that the erstwhile London School of Film Technique removed the 'technique' from its name?

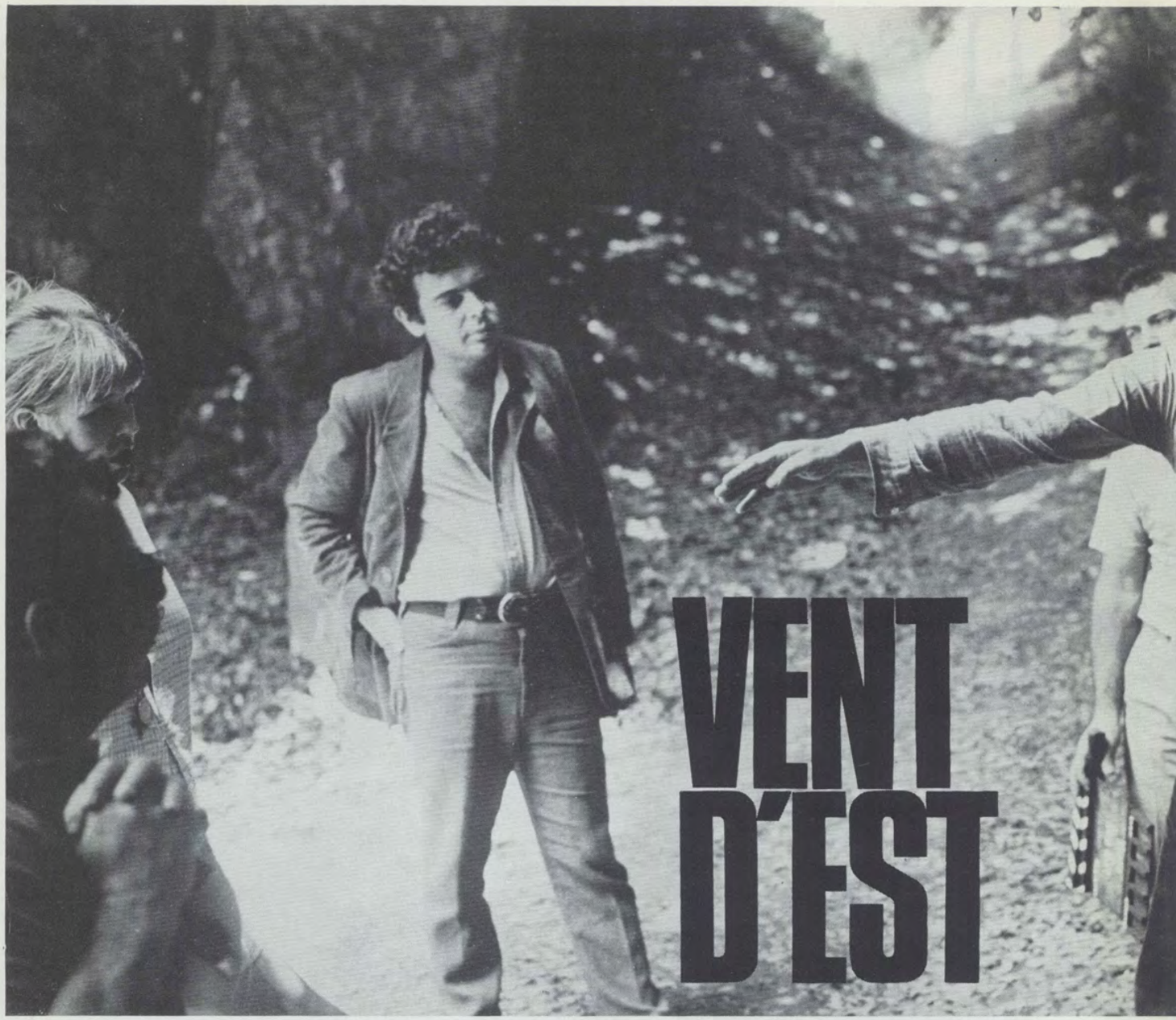
Any downgrading of technique is resented by many of the experts who make up teaching bodies because it is 'unprofessional'. It is also considered limiting by those students —and they should not be underestimated— who are concerned with getting an entrée into the industry, largely on the strength of what they have to show from film school days. There are many who see their life at film school simply as the first rung on the ladder, a means to an end. Their work is often ambitious. Peter Elford, a third year RCA student who also directs for the theatre, has just completed *Pass of Arms*, a supra-political moral allegory set in a mythological, almost Arthurian countryside. Two travelling knights meet near a river and fight a duel. Professional stuntmen joust, use swords, daggers and clubs in a scrupulously reconstructed set-piece. Finally one of them falls dead—the other raises the victim's visor only to find he has killed his brother. The film cost £15,000, was part financed by the NFFC, was shot with a student crew, and has all the 'flashy trappings'. Elford hopes to get the film out on circuit with a big feature—he also hopes for world-wide distribution, as the film is apparently suitable for an educational market. There can be no objection to this kind of hustling, and to complain about the *good* highly-finished film which occasionally comes out of a film school would be carping. It is understandable that some students should prefer finishing one or two good saleable films very well to perpetual, perhaps frustrating experiments. Even those who don't expect to hit the big time at once might reasonably jump at a lucrative job with James Garrett, uncrowned king of television commercials production, or with an ITV station. Lew Grade has often recruited from the RCA; in 1966 he gave the school a subsidy of £100,000. Only when the commercial mentality is taken to extremes would the schools be failing to do their job.

Film schools arrived in England much later than abroad. The Centro Sperimentale, now under Roberto Rossellini, was started under Mussolini. Moscow has had a film school since the 1920s, while the East European bloc—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Hungary—opened schools immediately after the Second World War. It is only recently that the RCA became a full member of CILECT, the international film school council. In many of these countries virtually everyone of any standing in the film industry is a past member of one of the film schools; which despite their new-found freedom were in those days deliberately organised as organs of totalitarian doctrine. Possibly another reason for the apparent political apathy of the English schools has been their traditional leaning *away* from propaganda. (They have also shunned the rigorously theoretical stance which used until very recently to characterise the work of the IDHEC in Paris.) As Keith Lucas of the Royal College of Art says, 'We do try to show students that if they're making a comedy there will be one out of the twenty alternative methods of editing which will probably work best—because it's closer to the discipline of the comic genre.' Joost Hunningher of the Polytechnic of Central London agrees that the only dogmas imposed in English film schools are those of the medium itself. And there is quite a case for arguing that the English eclecticism, even if it appears on occasion to lead to chaos, is preferable to indoctrination. ■

cab

baret

Director-choreographer:
Bob Fosse
Liza Minnelli
as Sally Bowles;
Joel Grey as the
Master of Ceremonies



VENT D'EST

or Godard and Rocha at the crossroads

James Roy MacBean

Near the middle of Godard's *Vent d'Est* (*Wind from the East*), there is a sequence where Brazilian film-maker Glauber Rocha plays a brief but symbolically important role. As Rocha stands with arms outstretched at a dusty crossroads, a young woman with a movie-camera comes up one of the paths (and the fact that she is very evidently pregnant is undoubtedly 'pregnant' with meaning). She goes up to Rocha and says very politely: 'Excuse me for interrupting your class struggle, but could you please tell me the way towards political cinema?'

Rocha points first in front of him, then behind him and to his left, and he says: 'That way is the cinema of aesthetic adventure and philosophical enquiry, while this way is the Third World cinema—a dangerous cinema, divine and marvellous, where the questions are practical ones like production, distribution, training 300 film-makers to make 600 films a year for Brazil alone, to supply one of the world's biggest markets.'

The woman starts off down the path to the Third World, when the inexplicable appearance of a red plastic ball seems to discourage her from proceeding in this direction. She takes a half-hearted kick at the ball, which rolls back to her anyway, as if it were doggedly insisting on following her—like Lamorisse's famous 'red balloon', which it resembles—and she then doubles back behind Glauber Rocha, who is still standing at the crossroads with arms outspread like a scarecrow or a crucified Christ without a cross. She sets out anew along the path of aesthetic adventure and philosophical enquiry.

I choose to begin an analysis of *Vent d'Est* by describing this brief sequence and suggesting some of its tongue-in-cheek symbolism because I believe it to be of critical importance, not just for an understanding of what Godard is trying to do in this film but also for an understanding of the way certain very important issues are shaping up in the vanguard of contemporary cinema. The presence of Rocha in this sequence is particularly significant; but the issues involved certainly go beyond just Godard and Rocha —and ultimately it may well be cinema itself which now stands at a critical crossroads.

To get at these issues and to delve more deeply into the significance of the 'crossroads' sequence, I think it best to take first a brief detour and explain a little of how *Vent d'Est* came into being and of Rocha's problematical association with this film at various stages of its development. Shortly after France's student uprisings in May 1968, Godard contacted one of the May

'Vent d'Est': Glauber Rocha and Godard

movement's leading militants, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and suggested that they collaborate on a film project which would explore the deadly ideological *malaise* at the root not only of French politics but of the post-Cold War political situation in general. Godard also indicated his desire to make the film in such a way as to draw parallels between the repressiveness of traditional political structures and the repressiveness of traditional film structures, particularly those of the standard Western.

Cohn-Bendit agreed, and Godard contacted the Italian producer Gianni Barcelloni, who had previously worked with directors like Pasolini and Glauber Rocha and the young French 'underground' film-maker Philippe Garrel. Barcelloni persuaded Cineriz to advance him $100,000 for 'a Western in colour, to be scripted by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, directed by Jean-Luc Godard, and starring Gian Maria Volonte.' What the producer and distributor apparently were expecting was something of the order of a 'Cohn-Bendit *le fou*.'

Shooting took place in Italy in early summer 1969. Godard, who by this time had committed himself to collective creation, assembled his three-man 'Dziga Vertov Group' (which, at this writing, is down to two members—Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin), his actress wife Anne Wiazemsky, numerous Italian actors and technicians, and a number of French and Italian militants of diverse leftist persuasions. Cohn-Bendit, who had discussed with Godard the overall conception of the film, showed up for only part of the shooting, apparently argued with Godard and Gorin, and does not appear in the finished film. (As Godard said in Berkeley last April, 'all the anarchists went to the beach.') Exit Cohn-Bendit. Enter Glauber Rocha.

In Rome for talks with Barcelloni, Rocha encountered Godard, who, as Rocha tells it, suggested that the two of them should coordinate efforts to 'destroy cinema'—to which Rocha replied that he was on a very different trip, that his business was to build cinema in Brazil and the rest of the Third World, to handle very practical problems of production, distribution, etc.

This argument seems to have given Godard the idea of shooting a 'Rocha at the crossroads' sequence to include in *Vent d'Est* as a way of delineating divergent revolutionary strategies. Rocha agreed to play his part, although he indicated his reluctance at 'joining the collective mythology of the unforgettable French May-Gang.'

In any case, the sequence was shot and Godard and Rocha parted amicably, but with each man apparently feeling that the other had failed to understand his position. Godard went to work on editing *Vent d'Est* and completed the film early in the winter. Rocha happened to be in Rome again at the time of the private preview, saw the film, and found himself—and everyone else—in such bewilderment and consternation at the path taken by Godard that he decided to write an article about the film for the Brazilian magazine *Manchete**.

At Cannes in May 1970, *Vent d'Est* was given a midnight showing during the Directors' Fortnight. (Godard, by the way, didn't want the film shown at Cannes at all: it was entirely the distributors' doing.) A few people admired the film; most hated it. Ditto for the September showing of *Vent d'Est* at the New York Festival. Ditto again for showings a few weeks later in Berkeley and San Francisco. But that kind of reaction is more or less to be expected whenever a new Godard film is first released. What is unusual and a bit more complicated is the controversy over whether or not *Vent d'Est* can be considered a 'visually beautiful' film, and whether or not 'visual beauty' is an attribute or a liability given Godard's revolutionary aims.

Much of the controversy over the film's visual quality may arise simply from the fact that both 35 mm. and 16 mm. prints are being shown; and that visually these are two very different films. Although the film was shot (entirely outdoors, by the way) in 16 mm., it is the blown-up 35 mm. print which is by far the better of the two, with very lush colour (especially the greens of the beautiful Italian countryside and the rose-red wall of an old half-ruined peasant dwelling). The 16 mm. print is dark and muddy, with very false, sombre colour.

But the controversy really gets thick when people start debating the relative merits and demerits of visual beauty (or its absence) in *Vent d'Est*. And as things now stand, it's even a bit difficult to determine who said what, and why—and which print they were talking about. For example, when the film was shown in Berkeley and San Francisco, some critics were heard countering viewers' objections to the 'visual trash' by pointing out that Glauber Rocha had supposedly criticised the film for being 'too beautiful' and thereby remaining in the realm of aesthetics instead of functioning as a politically militant film.

The trouble is, Rocha doesn't take this position at all. This line of reasoning, while mistakenly attributed to Rocha, is accepted in principle by Godard, who, however, turns the argument around to assert that 'if *Vent d'Est* succeeds at all, it's because it isn't beautifully made at all.' As for Rocha, in his *Manchete* article he comes out against *Vent d'Est* not because the film remains in the realm of aesthetics, but rather because he sees Godard as trying to destroy aesthetics. Rocha praises the film for its 'desperate beauty' but reproaches Godard for feeling so desperate about the usefulness of art. He laments that such a gifted artist as Godard (whom he compares to Bach and Michelangelo) should no longer have faith in art and should seek instead to 'destroy' it.

For Rocha, the present intellectual crisis in Western Europe over the usefulness of art is senseless and politically negative. He sees the European artist—best exemplified by Godard—as having worked himself into a dead end, and he concludes that where cinema is concerned, the Third World may be the only place where an artist can still fruitfully go about the task of making films. Godard, on the other hand, reproaches Rocha for having 'a producer's mentality', for thinking too much in so-called 'practical' terms of distribution, markets, etc., thereby perpetuating the capitalist structures of cinema by extending them to the Third World—and in the process, neglecting urgent theoretical questions that must be

Glauber Rocha at Godard's crossroads

* See *Manchete* no. 928 (January 31st, 1970), Rio de Janeiro.

asked if Third World cinema is to avoid merely repeating the ideological errors of Western cinema.

What sort of ideological errors might Godard have in mind? Well, let's go back to the 'crossroads' sequence in *Vent d'Est*. If our association of the red plastic ball with Lamorisse's 'red balloon' is correct, then this sequence reads something like this: the cinema, at a very pregnant stage of creative development, turns to the Third World for advice and direction regarding the proper relation between cinema and society ('political cinema'). Given a somewhat equivocal answer by Glauber Rocha, but sufficiently impressed by what he says about Third World cinema (and perhaps impressed simply by the way he says it—or rather *sings* it . . . in Portuguese), cinema starts off down the path to Third World cinema, only to discover, a few steps along the way, that Third World cinema is turning out Third World imitations of *The Red Balloon*. Discouraged by this, cinema decides quickly that the real way to advance lies not in this direction, but to proceed further along the path of aesthetic adventure and philosophical enquiry—which path she resolutely sets out upon.

Now, the question arises: what's wrong with *The Red Balloon*? What ideological errors, inherent in Western cinema, are manifest in *The Red Balloon*? What could possibly be objectionable in this charming tale of a little French boy and a balloon which endearingly follows him wherever he goes, like a friendly dog? André Bazin, one might recall, devoted one of his more important essays ('Montage Interdit', in Vol. 1 of *Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma?*) to *The Red Balloon* and to Lamorisse's other popular short, *Crin Blanc*. Bazin's argument—a basic stepping-stone in the development of his realist aesthetics—was that even in a film of such imaginative fantasy as *The Red Balloon*, what was essential (*ontologically essential*) was the cinematic faithfulness to reality, 'the simple photographic respect for spatial unity.' The fact that a trick was employed to enable the balloon to appear to follow the boy didn't matter to Bazin just so long as the trick was not a cinematographic trick—like, in his opinion, *montage*. What mattered was simply that whatever we saw on the screen had been photographed as it really happened in time and space. What we didn't see (like an imperceptible nylon thread which enabled Lamorisse to control the balloon) didn't matter to Bazin so long as what we did see really took place, was *pris sur le vif* by the camera, and was untampered with in the laboratory or on the editing table.

And it mattered not a bit to Bazin (in fact, it fitted in perfectly with his bourgeois humanist idealism) that this faithfulness to 'reality' served as a jumping-off point for simplistic metaphysical pretensions and sentimental moralising—as in *The Red Balloon*, where a struggle between the little boy and a gang of street toughies symbolises the struggle between Good and Evil, with Evil winning out here on Earth as the balloon gets popped, but Good winning out in another, 'higher' realm, as thousands of other balloons miraculously descend from on high, lift up the little boy and carry him up to the heavens.

For Bazin, as a careful reading reveals, all roads lead to the heavens. The religious terminology that crops up again and again in his writings is by no means coincidental or even merely metaphorical. Bazin's entire aesthetic system is rooted in a mystical-religious (Catholic) framework of transcendence. The faithful 'reflection of reality' is really just a prerequisite—and ultimately merely a *pretext*—for finding a 'transcendental truth' which supposedly exists in reality and is 'miraculously' revealed by the camera. Reality, if one reads Bazin carefully, sheds very quickly its *material* shell and is 'elevated' to a purely metaphysical (one could justifiably call it a theological) sphere.

Given half a chance (as when writing on Bresson's *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*), Bazin even lets the cat out of the bag—and his flagrant abuse of the term 'phenomenology' reaches the height of absurdity in 'a phenomenology of God's grace.' But even when writing about a film like Buñuel's *Land Without Bread*, which is a scathing documentation of the *material* condition of a specific people (the inhabitants of the valley of Las Hurdes) in a specific country (Spain) under a specific economic system (capitalism) with a specific ruling class coalition (between the bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church), all of which is pointed out with bitter emphasis in the film itself, Bazin nonetheless manages to sweep the *material* dust under the table so fast you hardly know what you saw, and he immediately takes off for the more edifying dust of the heavens.

Not once, it has been pointed out*, does Bazin in his article on *Land Without Bread* even mention the words 'class', 'exploited', 'rich', 'capitalism', 'property', 'proletariat', 'bourgeoisie', 'order', 'money', 'profit', etc. And what words do we find in their place? Large ones, broad generous concepts that are the staple of a long tradition of bourgeois humanist idealism — words like 'conscience', 'salvation', 'sadness', 'purity', 'integrity', 'objective cruelty of the world', 'transcendental truth', 'cruelty of the human condition', 'unhappiness', 'the cruelty in the Creation', 'destiny', 'horror', 'pity', 'madonna', 'human misery', 'surgical obscenity', 'love', '*dialectique pascalienne*' (it would have to be *pascalienne*!), 'all the beauty of a Spanish *Pietà*', 'nobility and harmony', 'presence of the beautiful in the atrocious', 'an infernal earthly paradise', etc., etc.

And this is no unique case, either in Bazin's writings or in bourgeois ideology in general. The more generous and general the concepts, the easier it is to cover up the *absence* of a materialist, process-oriented analysis of human society that, if undertaken, would reveal some hard, unpleasant facts that could cause people to start rocking the boat. In short, ideology functions at least as much in what it does *not* say—in what it keeps quiet—as in what it does say.

As for cinema, Godard deplores the way in which cinema, right from its birth, has been disfigured by a bourgeois capitalist ideology that permeates its very theoretical foundations and has never been correctly diagnosed, much less corrected. In *Vent d'Est*, therefore, he systematically takes apart the traditional elements of bourgeois cinema—especially as exemplified by the Western—revealing the sometimes hidden, sometimes blatant repressiveness which underlies it. What Godard attacks in *Vent d'Est* is what he calls 'the bourgeois concept of representation', which encompasses not only a certain acting style but also the traditional relations between image and sound—and ultimately, of course, the relations between the film and the audience.

Godard accuses bourgeois cinema of over-emphasising and playing on the deep-seated emotional fears and desires of the audience at the expense of their critical intelligence. He seeks to combat this tyranny of the emotions, not because he is 'against' emotions and 'for' rationality, nor because he is opposed to people's attitudes and actions being influenced by their experience of art; quite the contrary. But he believes strongly that the filmgoer should not be taken advantage of, that he should not be *manipulated* emotionally but should instead be addressed directly in a lucid dialogue which calls forth all of his human faculties.

The way things now stand, however, every element of a bourgeois film is carefully calculated to invite the viewer to indulge in the 'lived' emotional experience of a so-called 'slice of life' instead of assuming a critical, analytical and, ultimately, *political* attitude towards what he sees and hears. Why should one's attitude towards a film be political, one might ask? The answer is, of course, that the invitation to indulge in emotion at the expense of rational analysis already constitutes a political act—and implies a political attitude on the part of the viewer, without the viewer necessarily being even aware of it.

For one thing, by letting himself be emotionally 'moved' by the cinema—and even demanding that cinema should be emotionally moving—the filmgoer puts himself at the mercy of anyone who comes along with a lot of money to invest in seeing to it that filmgoers are 'moved'. And the people who have that kind of money also have a vested interest in making sure that audiences are 'moved' in the right direction —that is, in the direction of perpetuating the investor's advantageous position in an economic system which permits gross inequities in the distribution of wealth. In short, cinema (as well as television) functions as an ideological weapon used by the ruling-owning class to extend the market for the dreams which it sells.

Moreover, as Godard asserts in *Vent d'Est*, cinema tries to pass off bourgeois dreams as reality, and even plays on the heightening and enhancing effect of cinema in an effort to make us believe that these dreams depicted on our movie screens are somehow 'larger than life', that they are not only 'real' but somehow 'more real than the real'. In bourgeois cinema, all conspires to this effect: the acting style is at the same time 'realistic' and 'larger than life'; the decors are 'realistic' (or, if filmed on location, simply real), but they are also carefully selected for their beauty and their 'larger than life' aspect. Likewise for the costumes, clothing, jewelry and make-up worn by the actors and actresses, who, themselves, are carefully selected for their 'larger than life' aspect. Finally, even sound is used to give us the illusion that we are

* See Gérard Gozlan's critical reading of Bazin in *Positif* nos. 46 and 47 (June and July, 1962).

Anne Wiazemsky and Gian Maria Volonte

eavesdropping on a moment of 'reality' where the characters are oblivious of our presence and are simply living out their 'real-life' emotions.

Since *Week-End*, Godard has rejected conventional film dialogue because he finds that it contributes to this misguided illusion of 'reality' and makes it all the easier for the viewer-listener to imagine himself right up there with the people on the screen, present yet 'safe', in a perfect position (that of an eavesdropper and peeping Tom) to participate vicariously in the emotion of the moment. In short, the bourgeois cinema pretends to ignore the presence of the spectator, pretends that what is being said and done on the movie screen is not aimed at the spectator, pretends that the cinema is a 'reflection of reality'; yet all the time it plays on his emotions and capitalises on his identification-projection mechanisms in order to induce him, subtly, insidiously, unconsciously, to participate in the dreams and fantasies that are marketed by bourgeois capitalist society.

There is an excellent sequence in *Vent d'Est* where Godard demonstrates and demystifies what takes place behind the façade of bourgeois cinema. On the soundtrack we are told that 'In ten seconds you will see and hear a typical character in bourgeois cinema. He is in every film and he always plays a Don Juan type. He will describe the room you are sitting in.' We then see a close-up of a very handsome young Italian actor, standing at the edge of a swift-running stream and looking directly into the camera. Behind him—but photographed so that depth-perception is greatly reduced and the image as a whole is markedly flat—rises the grassy green slope of the opposite bank.

The young man speaks in Italian, while voices on the soundtrack give us a running translation in both French and English. The translation, however, is rendered 'indirectly': the voice tells us, 'He says the room is dark. He sees people sitting downstairs and also up in the balcony. He says there is an ugly old fogey over there, all wrinkled; and over here he says he has spotted a good-looking young chick. He says he would like to lay her. He asks her to come up on the screen with him. He says it's beautiful up there, with the sun shining and the green trees all around and lots of happy people having a good time. He says if you don't believe him, look . . .' And at that point the camera suddenly moves back and slightly upward, keeping the young man in focus in the righthand corner of the frame while it reveals on the left side—and what seems like almost a hundred feet below the young man—a breathtakingly beautiful scene of a waterfall spilling into a natural pool in a shaded glen where young people are diving and swimming in the clear water.

It's a magnificent shot. The image itself is extremely beautiful, and most amazing of all is the very complex restructuring of space accomplished by such a simple camera movement. But if we think about this sequence and its dazzling denouement, we realise that everything in it is a calculated come-on aimed at the dreams and fantasies of the audience. The man is young and handsome. When he speaks, he disparages age and ugliness and glorifies youth and glamour. What he wants is sex, what he offers is sex. On the screen, he assures us, everything is beautiful and people are happy.

And that sudden restructuring of space literally invites us into the image all by itself. Like bourgeois cinema in general, it presents the bourgeois capitalist world as one of great depth, inexhaustibly rich and endlessly inviting. And the bourgeois cinema's predilection for depth-of-field photography (see Bazin) emphasises the 'you are there' illusion and thereby masks its own presence (and its act of presenting this image) behind a self-effacing false modesty calculated to make cinema appear to be the humble servant of 'reality' itself instead of what it really is—the not at all humble lackey of the capitalist ruling class. The audience is flirted with, coaxed and cajoled into coming up on the screen to join the 'beautiful people' for a little sex and leisure amid beautiful surroundings. And the thing which really clinches the deal is the stunning virtuosity of the camera in providing visual thrills.

Once again, this raises the problem of visual beauty in 'political' cinema; but it also demonstrates how Godard uses visual beauty in new ways that serve to demystify (and make us less vulnerable to) the old uses of visual beauty in bourgeois cinema. After all, if beauty (like language) is one of the arms the ruling class uses to pacify us and 'keep us in our place', then one of our tasks is to turn that weapon around and make it work against the enemy. One way to do this is to demystify beauty and to show how the ruling class uses it against us; another way is to effect a 'transvaluation of values' in which we make a vice of the bourgeois concept of beauty while making a virtue of a very different concept (e.g., 'Black is Beautiful') which the bourgeoisie will be unable to recognise or accept. In his films since *Week-End*, Godard has been utilising both of these tactics: his films now have a very different look about them which a lot of people are unable to consider 'beautiful'; and when individual shots or sequences do have a visual quality which most filmgoers would consider 'beautiful', there is always some cinematic element or juxtaposition of elements which calls our attention to just how 'beauty' is achieved and how it is used as an ideological weapon.

In any case, whatever the pros and cons may be where 'beauty' in a militant film is concerned, it certainly does no good to criticise Godard's use of visual beauty in *Vent d'Est* without having understood just how and why he uses it—or, still worse, to criticise him for trying to 'move' people emotionally as the bourgeois cinema does, but failing in this effort because his images have a very formal beauty which somehow turns the viewer off instead of turning him on. And, inexplicably, this latter is exactly what Glauber Rocha seems to do when, in the *Manchete* article, he criticises the shot of the 'American cavalry officer' roughing up the girl militant (Anne Wiazemsky) for not really being frightening at all, but only beautiful. What Rocha inexcusably seems not to realise is that Godard does not want this shot to be frightening and that he makes it beautiful in precisely such a way as to ensure that it couldn't be frightening. While the officer (Gian Maria Volonte) wrings the girl's neck and shouts at her, someone off-screen throws thick globs of red paint that catch in her auburn hair and splatter the officer's dark blue coat. The visual effect, with its rich interplay of colours and textures, is quite striking, and it serves to distance us from the action and the emotion it might otherwise arouse.

A few moments later, Godard gives us another, similar shot, only handled this time more in the emotive style of bourgeois cinema. Instead of shooting from behind the girl's right shoulder as he did in the previous 'torture' shot (with torturer and victim face-to-face, but only the torturer's face seen by the audience), Godard now has the officer holding the girl from behind so that the scene can be shot to reveal both their faces in frontal close-up, with the framing and composition and lighting drawing our attention particularly to the girl's grimaces of

pain. This time, however, no paint is thrown in and there are no overtly theatrical elements of the 'distancing' kind. There is only a very good acting performance by Anne Wiazemsky, who really seems to be wincing with great pain. In a bourgeois film, this shot might be quite painful or frightening for the audience (especially if the girl screamed, as the bourgeois cinema loves to have actresses do); but in this film, coming after the earlier 'torture' shot with the paint thrown in, the painful or frightening effect is minimised (notice that I do *not* say it is eliminated) and our critical intelligence is alerted to analyse the differences in handling between the two shots.

Later, a similar alerting of our critical faculties occurs in the sequence where the cavalry officer rides around on horseback clubbing the recalcitrant prisoners—another scene which Rocha finds extremely beautiful but which he criticises for not turning out to be brutal the way he (and even Ventura, who was the sound man for *Vent d'Est*) thinks the scene was intended. What Godard does in this sequence is to utilise a few of the techniques so often employed by the bourgeois cinema for this type of violent action sequence—turning the sound volume way up and continually making abrupt camera movements. The effect of these devices is usually a high emotional intensity and a very visceral sense of violence and confusion. (Remember their use in *Tom Jones*.) But Godard has made one major variation on these elements which completely changes our relation to this sequence.

His camera does continually make abrupt movements, but it also traces a very precise formal pattern—swinging abruptly about 35° left, then 35° right, back and forth several times, then abruptly swinging about 35° up, then 35° down, and so on, exploring in a very formal way the closed space of the lush ravine where the action takes place. The purely formal quality of these camera movements (Rocha admiringly proclaimed them 'unprecedented in the whole history of film') effectively distances us from the action and prevents us from reacting to it emotionally. In short, this sequence is not meant to be brutal, but it is meant to call our attention to the way bourgeois cinema would make it brutal—and in so doing, brutalise us.

As in the 'torture' shots, our critical intelligence is alerted to compare the way various cinematic elements are normally used and what effects they produce, with the very different way they are used by Godard and the very different effects they produce in *Vent d'Est*. Or at least that's what *should* happen. But if even people like Glauber Rocha fail to see what Godard is doing and why, then something is wrong somewhere. It would be convenient, of course, to pin the blame on Godard, to say that his experiments with image and sound are just too complex or too cryptic to be understood. But I find this argument much more of an excuse for intellectual laziness than a justified put-down of Godard. His experiments with the elements of cinema are not that hard to understand; after all, he makes a point of critically calling attention to what he is doing. And all he asks is that the viewer-listener do a little critical thinking of his own instead of merely sitting back and wiating for his emotions to be played with.

No, what's wrong, I'm afraid, is not what Godard does with image and sound; it's the way even people who should know better look and listen to those images and sounds. What's wrong is the tremendously strong habit of looking at films in a bourgeois way. What's wrong is that even politically militant films are expected to express their militancy in the same language that bourgeois films use to inculcate the dreams and fantasies of bourgeois capitalism. What's wrong is that even among the world's leading film-makers —and even among those who are seeking a revolutionary transformation of society— not nearly enough thought is given to theoretical questions of the uses and abuses of image and sound, and of the ways to build new relations between them that will no longer exploit the viewer-listener but will instead engage him openly and forthrightly in a lucid dialogue, the other half of which must come from him.

But the way things stand now, the film-goer rarely seems to look upon the cinema as a dialogue between himself and the film, and he relinquishes all too readily his own active part in that dialogue and hands over the tool of dialogue exclusively to the people in the film. And the more emotionally charged is the dialogue in the film, the more the viewer is 'moved' by it. In *Vent d'Est*, however, this habitual passivity is challenged from the outset, as Godard gives us an opening shot that arouses our curiosity (a young man and woman are seen lying motionless on the ground, their arms bound together by a heavy chain) but systematically thwarts our expectations by simply holding the shot for nearly eight minutes without any action (the young man does stir enough gently to touch the face of the young woman at one point) and without dialogue. In fact, when the voice-over 'commentary' finally breaks in (on the 'forest murmurs' we have been hearing), what we get is not dialogue but the critique of dialogue.

Ostensibly talking about strike tactics in some labour dispute, the speaker states at one point that what is needed is dialogue, but that dialogue is usually handed over to a 'qualified representative' who translates the demands of the workers into the language of the bosses, and in so doing betrays the people he supposedly represents. This voice-over discussion of the failure of dialogue clearly refers to the bargaining dialogues that go on between labour and capital; and a few minutes later, in the next sequence, there is a demonstration (in the style of a Western movie) of the way the 'qualified representative' (the union delegate) distorts the real demands of the workers (for revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system which exploits them) by translating those demands into terms the bosses can deal with (higher wages, shorter hours, better working conditions, etc.). But in a strange and insightful way, this discussion of the failure of dialogue in the hands of a 'qualified representative' also refers to the failure of dialogue within the 'bourgeois concept of representation' in the cinema.

'What is needed is dialogue': this statement in the voice-over 'commentary' seems to echo our own thoughts as we watch this exasperatingly long, static and dialogue-less shot. We are impatient to 'get into the movie', we are impatient to get on with plot. We wonder why the young couple are lying on the ground and why they are chained together. We wish they would at least regain consciousness enough to start talking to one another so that we could find out, from their dialogue, what is happening—that is, what is happening *to them*. As usual, in the cinema, we don't ask ourselves what is happening *to us*. We don't ask ourselves why a film addresses *us* in this particular way or that. In fact, we rarely think of a film as addressing us or, for that matter, anyone at all. We sit back and accept the tacit understanding that a film is a 'reflection of reality' captured in the mirror of that magical 'eye of God' that is a movie-camera. We sit back passively and wait for a film to lead us by the hand —or, more literally, by the heart.

'A young man and woman are seen lying motionless on the ground, their arms bound together by a heavy chain . . .'

We relinquish our dialogue with the film; and when this happens the film no longer speaks with us, or even to us, but instead speaks *for us*, in our place. And in bourgeois capitalist society, film (like television) speaks the language of big business, which seeks constantly to shove more goods down our gullets, to get us to like being force-fed, to get us to desire the very state of affairs which perpetuates our exploited and alienated condition. In letting a film speak for us, we allow our real needs to be distorted into the ersatz needs big business wants us to have. We are accomplices in our own betrayal.

What is to be done, then, to get us out of this deplorable situation? As the voice-over speaker in *Vent d'Est* puts it: 'Today the question "what is to be done" is urgently asked of militant film-makers. It is no longer a question of what path to take; it is a question of what one should do practically on a path that the history of revolutionary struggles has helped us to recognise. To make a film, for example, is to ask oneself the question "where do we stand". And what does this question mean for a militant film-maker? It means, first but not exclusively, opening a parenthesis in which we ask ourselves what the history of revolutionary cinema can teach us.'

There then follows a most interesting rundown on some of the high points and weak spots of what could be qualified as revolutionary cinema—beginning with the young Eisenstein's admiration for D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*. Certainly Griffith was a decisive influence on Eisenstein; and, through Eisenstein, on the first great chapter of revolutionary cinema—the Russian silent film. But the 'commentator' in *Vent d'Est* asserts that from a revolutionary standpoint this borrowing of technique from the expressive arsenal of a 'North American imperialist' (Griffith) eventually did more harm than good, and represents a defeat in the history of revolutionary cinema. As a consequence of this initial ideological error, it is affirmed, Eisenstein confused primary and secondary tasks, and instead of glorifying the struggles of the present, glorified the historical revolt of the sailors of the Battleship Potemkin. As a second consequence, in 1929, when he made *The General Line* (also called *The Old and the New*), Eisenstein managed to find new ways of expressing czarist repression, but could only utilise the same old forms to express the process of collectivisation and agrarian reform. In his case, it is asserted, the 'old' ultimately won out over the 'new'—and, as a consequence, Hollywood found no difficulty in hiring Eisenstein to film revolution in Mexico, while at the same time in Berlin Dr. Goebbels asked Leni Riefenstahl to make 'a Nazi Potemkin'.

All of this may sound somewhat heretical and perhaps arbitrary, but there is actually a very perceptive argument here if one follows it closely. The same techniques that Griffith used to glorify in retrospect the old racist cause of the Southern whites in the American Civil War were taken over and developed by Eisenstein to glorify in retrospect an already twenty-year-old episode (the mutiny of the Battleship Potemkin took place in 1905)—and not a particularly important one at that—in the history of the Russian Revolution. Later, when confronted with the task of dealing with issues of contemporary urgency (collectivisation), Eisenstein could only trot out the same—now somewhat older—techniques. Later still, those same techniques were perfectly compatible with the propaganda of the Nazis; and Eisenstein himself was not altogether unjustifiably considered to be 'co-optable' by Hollywood.

The problem is that the cinematic forms which Eisenstein inherited from Griffith, and which he then developed, were not sufficiently flexible to deal with the complexities of the ongoing present, but were very well suited to emotionalised, reconstituted documentaries of past history. Moreover, precisely because they emphasised the emotional, 'lived', 'you are there' aspect of history, it was all too easy for these cinematic forms to be used to stir up people's emotional involvement in even such aberrant doctrines as Hitler's 'racial purity' and blind obedience to the Führer.

Next in line for critical scrutiny is Dziga Vertov, in whose name Godard founded his militant film-makers' collective. Vertov is credited with achieving a victory for revolutionary cinema when he declared that 'there is no cinema which stands above class, no cinema which stands above class struggle' and that 'cinema is only a secondary task in the world struggle for revolutionary liberation.' But Vertov is faulted for having forgotten that, in the words of Lenin, 'politics commands the economy'—with the result that his film *The Eleventh Year* does not sing the praises of eleven years of sound political leadership at the hands of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but glorifies instead Russia's surging economy and developing industry in exactly the same emotional terms that capitalist propaganda uses to glorify its own economic growth. 'It is at this point,' *Vent d'Est's* commentator asserts, 'that revisionism invaded the Soviet movie screens once and for all.'

Next in the rundown of revolutionary cinema is the 'false victory' of the early Sixties, when progressive African governments, having achieved their revolution and kicked out the imperialists, 'let them back through the window of the movie-camera' by turning over the production of films to the old European and American movie industry—'thereby giving white Christians the right to speak on behalf of blacks and Arabs.' Finally, a victory is claimed for revolutionary cinema in the recent report of Comrade Kiang Tsing* (wife of Mao), in which the theory of 'the royal road to realism' was denounced, along with a denunciation of most of the canons of the old Stalinist 'socialist-realism' aesthetics.

Throughout this brief 'bird's-eye view' of revolutionary cinema there runs the unifying thread of the necessity of thinking through very thoroughly the theoretical foundations of one's cinematic *praxis*. If we (along with Godard) can learn anything from the history of revolutionary cinema, it is clearly that constant self-critical vigilance is necessary if a film-maker is to avoid playing unwittingly into the hands of the opposition. And if a film-maker's commitment to revolutionary liberation is more than just an emotional identification with the oppressed, then his cinematic practice must address itself to more than just the emotions and identification-projection mechanisms of the audience. If he is firmly convinced (as Godard is) that the process of revolutionary liberation involves far more than just the revenge of the persecuted, and that it offers the concrete possibility of putting an end to persecution (in other words, of creating an objectively more *just* society in which the free development of the individual works for rather than against the free development of his fellow man), then it is the film-maker's urgent task to create cinematic forms which, themselves, work for rather than against the free development of the spectator, forms which do not manipulate his emotions or his unconscious but which provide him with an analytical tool to utilise in dealing with the complexity of the present.

Cavalryman and Indian

And self-criticism is an integral part of Godard's analytical cinema, as witnessed by the fact that the second half of *Vent d'Est* is given over to his critique of his own previous efforts at revolutionary film-making. The first and most serious criticism he brings forth is his own previous lack (and present insufficiency) of contact with the masses. (Since he began working collectively within the 'Dziga Vertov Group' after May 1968, Godard has made increasingly frequent and fruitful contacts with militant workers' groups, especially at Issy-les-Moulineaux outside Paris.) Secondly, he criticises the 'bourgeois sociology' approach to cinema, in which the film-maker shows the misery of the masses but does not show their struggles. (While this criticism is made in the 'com-

* See 'Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Lin Piao Entrusted Comrade Kiang Tsing,' Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1968.

mentary', we see a number of shots of shanty-town houses and modern high-rise apartment buildings like the ones Godard photographed for *Deux ou Trois Choses que Je Sais d'Elle*—which film he has referred to as 'a sociological essay'.) The trouble with this approach—as well as with *cinéma vérité*—it is asserted, is that by not showing the struggles of the masses one weakens their ability to struggle; and the implication is that the cinematic image of their misery simply reinforces their own self-image of misery, while the cinematic image of their struggles conversely reinforces their ability to carry on the struggle.

Finally, it is pointed out that contemporary cinema in Russia ('Brezhnev-Mosfilm') is perfectly interchangeable with contemporary cinema in America ('Nixon-Hollywood'); and moreover that the two of them together are perfectly interchangeable with what passes for 'progressive' cinema at the avant-garde festivals throughout Europe. These so-called 'liberated' films, it is asserted, are revisionist because they do not question the bourgeois cinema's relations between image and sound, and because although they have broken the old bourgeois taboos on sex, drugs and apocalyptic poetry, they have continued to uphold the most important taboo of all—that which prohibits the depicting of the class struggle. (Self-criticism is clearly implicit in this statement too, since the same reproach could be made—and has been made by Godard himself—to all his own films up to and including *Week-End*.)

But Godard's self-criticism does not arise out of morbid self-doubt, defeatism or an urge for self-destruction, as Glauber Rocha argues rather vindictively in his article on *Vent d'Est*. On the contrary, self-criticism plays a large part in Godard's current cinematic practice (and, for that matter, it always has—at least implicitly) for the simple reason that Godard, along with Mao, considers self-criticism a *constructive* activity of the highest order. (And in the cinema, as we have seen, this kind of check on the almost unilateral power wielded by the film-maker over his audience is urgently needed.)

Godard's recent films are politically pointed, to be sure; but although the verbal 'commentary' is prominent—if not pre-eminent—the films are not exhortatory. There is nothing demagogic in Godard's approach either to cinema or to politics. A film like *Vent d'Est* is at the opposite pole in cinematic method from either Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* or Eisenstein's *Potemkin*. And for that matter, Godard's *British Sounds*, *Pravda* and *Vent d'Est* are far removed in cinematic method from Rocha's *Black God, White Devil*, *Land in a Trance* and *Antonio das Mortes*. There is a strong messianic tone in Rocha's films that is very alien to Godard's way of constructing a film. (It is quite clear, by the way, that Rocha's outstretched arms in *Vent d'Est*—suggesting a parallel between Rocha and Christ—constitutes Godard's ironic comment on the messianic aspects of Rocha's film style.)

And while both Rocha and Godard are committed to the worldwide struggle for revolutionary liberation, they clearly have very divergent opinions about how revolution can develop and how cinema can contribute to that development. Rocha takes the 'spontaneous' approach and largely discounts the importance of theoretical concerns, which he considers mere 'auxiliaries' to the spontaneous energy of the masses. He has expressed his belief that: 'The true revolutionaries in South America are individuals, suffering personalities, who are not involved in theoretical problems . . . the provocation to violence, the contact with bitter reality that may eventually produce violent change in South America, this upheaval can only come from individual people who have suffered themselves and who have realised that a need for change is present—not for theoretical reasons but because of personal agony.'* And Rocha emphasises his belief that the real strength of the South American masses lies in *mysticism*, in 'an emotional, Dionysiac behaviour' which he sees as arising from a mixture of Catholicism and African religions. The energy which has its source in mysticism, Rocha argues, is what will ultimately lead the people to resist oppression—and it is this emotional energy which he seeks to tap in his films.

Godard, on the other hand, rejects the emotional approach as one which plays into the hand of the enemy and seeks to combat mystification in any form, whether from the Right or the Left. While there is no indication that Godard underestimates the importance of the agonised personal experience of oppression as a starting-point for the development of revolutionary consciousness, he clearly takes the position that solidly developed organisation on sound theoretical foundations is needed if the revolutionary movement is to advance beyond the stage of abortive, short-lived, 'spontaneous' uprisings (like the May 1968 events in France).

And in emphasising the theoretical struggle, Godard follows in the path of no less a practical revolutionary than Lenin himself, who in his pamphlet entitled *What Is to be Done?* (echoes of which abound in *Vent d'Est*), roundly castigated the 'cult of spontaneity' and pointed out that '*any* cult of spontaneity, any weakening of the "element of lucid awareness" . . . *signifies* in itself—*and whether one wants it this way or not is immaterial—a reinforcing of the influence of bourgeois ideology*.'† [Italics are Lenin's.] Or, as Lenin puts it a few lines further on: 'The problem poses itself in these terms and no others: bourgeois ideology or socialist ideology. There is no middle ground (for humanity has never set up a 'third' ideology; and, in any case, where society is torn by class-struggle, there could never be an ideology above and beyond class).' And later, 'But why—asks the reader—does the spontaneous movement, which tends towards the direction of the least effort, lead precisely to domination by bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that, chronologically, bourgeois ideology is much older than socialist ideology, that it is much more thoroughly elaborated, and that it possesses infinitely more means of diffusion.' And finally, 'The greater the spontaneous spirit of the masses, and the more the movement is widespread, then all the more urgent is the necessity of the utmost lucidity in our theoretical work, our political work and our organising.'‡

Lest anyone be tempted, by the way, to jump to the conclusion (one which Rocha seems to encourage in his article on *Vent d'Est*) that the differences of opinion on revolutionary strategy between Godard and Rocha are simply the result of cultural differences between the European world-view and that of the Third World, it should be pointed out that even in the South American cinema there is nowhere near unanimous support for the 'spontaneous' approach. South American film-makers are increasingly following the lead of the Argentine film-maker Fernando Solanas (*La Hora de los Hornos*) in calling for an intensification of the theoretical struggle at the level of ideology.

It must be understood, however, that Rocha has a legitimate gripe when he complains of the flood of imitation-Godard monstrosities being turned out by self-indulgent film students in the Third World and everywhere. But the blame is hardly Godard's. (Does anyone doubt for a moment that these same students would be turning out self-indulgent monstrosities whether Godard existed or not?) Moreover, if there is anything which could effectively combat the sort of mindless self-indulgence which characterises not only most student films but quite simply most films in general, surely it is the very thorough, resolute and self-disciplined *theoretical praxis* embodied by the films of Jean-Luc Godard.

I use the expression *theoretical praxis* quite pointedly, for I want to emphasise that *theory* and *practice* are by no means mutually exclusive. To illustrate what I mean, let us pick up once more, by way of a conclusion, the 'crossroads' metaphor. Godard's path—which, as he points out, is simply the path which study of the history of revolutionary cinema has helped him to recognise—is the path of creating the theoretical foundations of revolutionary cinema within the day-to-day practice of making films. The real dilemma for film-makers today is not a choice between theory and practice. The act of making films necessarily combines both—and this is true whether one makes films in the Third World, Russia or the West.

In *Vent d'Est's* 'crossroads' sequence, there is even a strong visual suggestion that the three-way intersection is simply the point where two paths—that of the Third World and that which the European woman with a movie-camera has travelled up to this point—converge and join together in what is really one big ongoing path of 'aesthetic adventure and philosophical enquiry'; which, by necessity, combines both theory and practice. ■

* Quoted from 'The Way to Make a Future: A Conversation with Glauber Rocha', by Gordon Hitchens. *Film Quarterly*, Fall 1970.

† Lenin, *Que Faire?* Editions Sociales, Paris, 1969. All translations from the French edition are by the present author.

‡ This latter statement comes closest to Lenin's later qualification of the position adopted in *What Is to be Done?*—which position, as he indicated, was a tactical response arising from a concrete analysis of a concrete situation (the 1902 squabbles among diverse factions of the left). Later, when the potential dangers of the spontaneous position were no longer as much of a threat to the revolution, Lenin toned down the attack on spontaneity and called for a more dialectical approach of 'organised spontaneity and spontaneous organisation.' (For excellent material on this, see the special Lenin-Hegel issue of *Radical America*, September-October, 1970.)

OUT OF OBLIVION:

Alice Guy, about 1900

ALICE GUY BLACHE

Francis Lacassin

There are enough women film-makers now for it to be easy to forget just how recent a phenomenon they are. Yet it was only in the Fifties, with the growth of television and the decline of the big studio monopolies, that they began to come into their own. Until 1939, there were only a dozen women directors in the world. From 1915 to 1925, you could count them on the fingers of one hand. In 1914 there were two of them. And before that there was only one: a Frenchwoman named Alice Guy.

Still very much alive—at the age of 97, she lives quietly in an American nursing-home—Alice Guy was not only the doyenne of women film-makers. She was also the only one to have been in at the birth of the cinema. Her career, which ended in 1920 in the United States, began in the 19th century in Paris, at Buttes-Chaumont, where she built the first Gaumont studio; today the site is occupied by the ORTF television studios.[1] Her work was also the most prolific: approximately two hundred reels between 20 and 680 metres long (in terms of contemporary projection speeds, between one and forty minutes) up to 1906; more than 70 two-reelers and features between 1910 and 1920. She founded and directed, or contributed to the founding in the United States, of four production companies and one distribution company. She took on the Edison Trust, by braving their ban on productions over two reels long.

But, as far as posterity is concerned, it is better to come second or third than first. Inaugurated in the prehistoric period and over before the history of the cinema was born, Alice Guy's career on both sides of the Atlantic has been either forgotten or attributed to other people. But a meeting with her, our subsequent correspondence, and research in New York and Los Angeles, have enabled me to reconstruct her story.

Alice Guy was born in Paris on July 1 1873, in a comfortable bourgeois family which was bankrupted on three separate occasions, once as a result of an earthquake. At the age of four, she went with her family to Santiago (a long journey: there was still no Panama Canal), left Chile again at the age of six, and was later educated at a convent in Paris. On her father's death, determined to ensure her independence, she learned shorthand-typing, still a rare accomplishment. Her mother ran various charity committees and at one of them she met some of Léon Gaumont's family. Alice was hired by Gaumont as a secretary.

In 1885 the Gaumont organisation had taken over the Comptoir de Photographie. They manufactured films and cameras, and the Lumière Brothers' invention led them to take an interest in the cinema. In 1896, with the collaboration of the engineer Demeny, Gaumont launched a 60mm. camera. In 1897, with the collaboration of Decaux, he marketed a 35mm. combined camera-projector. This was followed in 1898 by an inexpensive machine designed solely for projection: the 'Gaumont Chronophotographe', mass-produced and aimed at film exhibitors. As an accessory for demonstration purposes, Gaumont had hitherto produced a few reels of factual or news footage. The success of his new machine obliged him to provide customers with fiction films along the lines of those made by Pathé. He entrusted his active secretary with the organisation of this new branch. With no resources and no qualified staff, Mademoiselle Alice decided to tackle the job herself.

In the small garden of her boss's house in the factory grounds,[2] she set up a few backdrops and with the help of a much amused friend, Yvonne Mugnier-Serand, she shot *La Fée aux Choux* (later retitled *Sage-femme de 1ère Classe*). In a picture postcard vein of humour, it tells the story of a woman who grows children in a cabbage patch. This first effort was well received, and as she'd enjoyed the experience its author decided to continue her new career. She had plenty of time for it: it was only a question of producing a total of anything from twelve to twenty very short films a year. When I spoke to her, Alice Guy claimed that she had started making films before Méliès. It seems unlikely, however, that Gaumont would have envisaged producing fiction films before they started mass-producing their projectors in 1898; or, at the very earliest, their combined camera-projector in 1897.

For her next films, Alice Guy managed to obtain a few professional performers. The only people willing to risk appearing in films and ready to work for the fees Gaumont

[1] One can't help regretting that French television should have labelled its studios A,B,C,D, like different-sized saucepans, instead of calling them after the pioneers who used to work there: Alice Guy, Léon Gaumont, Feuillade, Musidora.

[2] This little house is still standing. Until a few years ago it served as the ORTF staff canteen.

offered were acrobats, vaudeville actors like Henri Gallet, or *chansonniers* like Roullet-Plessis. Occasionally, in exceptional circumstances, she was able to hire some of the famous clowns of the age: the O'ners in *La Voiture Cellulaire, Déménagement à la Cloche de Bois, Ballet de Singes, La Crinoline* and (1905) *Une Noce au Lac Saint-Fargeau.* She tackled every genre. Fairytales and fantasies: *Faust et Méphisto, La Fève Enchantée, Lui, La Légende de Saint-Nicolas, La Fée Printemps* (1906, in colour). Saucy comedies: *Les Fredaines de Pierrette, Charmant Froufrou, J'ai un Hanneton dans mon Pantalon!* Trick comedies: *Le Cake-walk de la Pendule, Le Fiancé Ensorcelé.* Religious subjects: *La Messe de Minuit, Le Noël de Pierrot.*

For the comedies she sometimes concentrated on a single actor. *La Première Cigarette* (60 metres, August 1904) shows in semi-close-up the reactions, as observed by his terrified sister, of a boy sneakily smoking a cigarette. (This film has been wrongly attributed to Emile Cohl who, in fact, only started at Gaumont after Alice Guy had left.) She advanced to longer and longer films with larger and larger casts. From *Les Apaches pas Veinards* (20 metres, March 1903) she went on to *L'Assassinat du Courrier de Lyon* (122 metres, April 1904) and from there to *Rapt d'Enfants par les Romanichels* (six scenes and 225 metres; October 1904). 1904 was her year for children, who provided the inspiration for *Le Baptême de la Poupée, Les Petits Peintres* and especially *Les Petits Coupeurs de Bois Vert*, a delightfully naive melodrama. Two children, whose sick mother has fallen asleep in front of the dying fire in their humble cottage, go to gather wood in a nearby forest. They are caught by the gamekeepers and brought before a magistrate. On hearing of their plight, the latter cannot hold back his tears and lets them go after slipping a coin into the hand of the older child.

Alice Guy told me that all the films produced by Gaumont up to the autumn of 1905 can be attributed to her, except for a few films made in 1904 and 1905. It was in 1904, in fact, that she was surprised to come across Ferdinand Zecca in the streets of La Villette selling soap from door to door: formerly Charles Pathé's right-hand man and the head of his production section, a sudden fall from favour had reduced him to this extremity. One detail moved Alice Guy more than all the rest: 'Zecca was wetting the soap to make it weigh more.' She immediately offered her former rival a job; and although Zecca was in fact reinstated with Pathé a few weeks later, during his short time at Gaumont he acted as assistant and also directed a few films himself—most notably *Les Méfaits d'une Tête de Veau*, one of the big successes of the Gaumont repertoire. For a long time, this was the only film actually attributed to Alice Guy, although by her own account it was one of the few Gaumont pictures that she *didn't* make. The source of this historical error lies with the reminiscences of Etienne Arnaud, who began work at La Villette two years after this film was made.

Working with Zecca brought home to her the need for an assistant. It was difficult for her to deal single-handed with the ever-increasing demand for films. Moreover, she wanted to devote herself to longer, more elaborate pictures. *Rélubilitation*, 'a dramatic scene' made in 1904, attained the then considerable length of 250 metres. Under the title of *Esmeralda*, she was planning an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame*; and of course she had to bring out a *Life of Christ* to compete with the one Pathé had just released. These two films—both 'super-productions' in their day—were released in December 1905 and January 1906 and were respectively 290 and 680 metres long: they both involved extensive casts, particularly the second—300 extras . . . and 25 wooden sets designed by Henri Ménessier. The engineer Decaux personally helped cut them out and mount them on mobile platforms, for some decors were set up out of doors in the forest of Fontainebleau. Handling these three hundred extras, scraped from the bottom of the barrel and reluctant to be bossed around by a woman, led Alice Guy to hire a kind of production manager who would be part assistant and part director. Her choice fell on Victorin Jasset (1862–1913), producer at the Hippodrome (now the Gaumont-Palace) of popular historical reconstructions—Vercingetorix, Joan of Arc, etc. Which is how *Esmeralda* and *La Vie du Christ* came to be wrongly attributed to Jasset, who was merely the directress' assistant. In 1963, while comparing it to stills which she had kept from the film, Alice Guy showed me the collection of chromos which had provided her visual inspiration: namely, *La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* by James Tissot, published in Tours by Alfred Mame.

Jasset also assisted Alice Guy on a film shot in his native district, *Descente dans les Mines à Fumay*. Finally, Alice Guy confirmed that he himself directed two or three films including the bizarre *Rêves d'un Fumeur d'Opium*. Although she was satisfied with him both as an assistant and a director, she did not keep him because Léon Gaumont thought that the interest he showed in the young female extras was more than strictly professional. He thereby deprived himself of an exceptional collaborator. Jasset later became one of the founders of the Eclair Company and remained its artistic director until his death. It was at Eclair that he created the thriller genre (later perfected by Feuillade) with his serials *Nick Carter* (1907–1910), *Zigomar* and two masterpieces, *Balaco*, based on Gaston Leroux, and *Protéa*.

In the autumn of 1905, Gaumont deposited a pile of scripts on the desk of his artistic directress. They had been sent him by Michel Coissac of La Maison de la Bonne Presse, publishers of *La Croix* and *Le Pèlerin*, and were written by one of Coissac's former colleagues: Louis Feuillade. Alice Guy liked the scripts, sent for their author and asked if he'd like to direct the films himself. But Feuillade, who had just become a father, was reluctant to give up the security of his job with the *Revue Mondiale*. He suggested that she might instead try Etienne Arnaud (1879–1955), a friend from L'Hérault with whom he had written a one-act verse play, *Le Clos*, and founded the Toro-Club of Paris. A law graduate, a former *chansonnier*, and currently out of work, Arnaud made his debut as director by shooting Feuillade's first script, *Attrapez mon Chapeau!*, which came out in January 1906. He continued working for Gaumont, with historical films his particular speciality, until 1911. Then he went to America as director of the Eclair Company's new studios at Fort Lee on the Hudson. In 1922 he published his book of reminiscences, *Le Cinéma pour Tous*.

Feuillade's energy and cheerfulness usually infected everyone who worked with him, and he got on very well with Alice Guy. Promoted to being the company screen-

The Crucifixion scene from 'La Vie du Christ', 1905

Alice Guy Blaché with Sarah, star of 'The Beasts of the Jungle'. Fort Lee, 1914.

writer, he brought her three scenarios regularly every week until—not many months after, according to Alice Guy—he gave up journalism for film direction. His invention was so prolific that for the next year or so he continued to provide plots for most of the films made by his colleagues—in particular Roméo Bosetti, originally the actor in the *Roméo* serials and then director of the *Calino* serials (starring Mégé) until they were taken over in 1910 by Jean Durand.

With Arnaud, Feuillade, Bosetti and J. Roullet-Plessis, another actor turned director, to meet most of Gaumont's needs, Alice Guy could spend more time on her own films; and on the Company's new department. Gaumont had always believed in talking pictures. In 1905 he marketed the 'Chronophone', which combined sound recorded on a wax cylinder with the filmed image, and throughout 1906 and until the spring of 1907, Alice Guy was kept busy directing some hundred films for the Chronophone. Rarely more than a minute or two long, they mostly featured singers in performance or *tableaux* accompanied by choral singing. After *Les Ballets de l'Opéra* (with Gaillard) and *Les Sœurs Mante Danseuses Mondaines*, she recorded Rose Caron's class at the Conservatoire in *Carmen*, *Mignon*, *Manon*, *Les Dragons de Villars*, *Les Cloches de Corneville*, *Madame Angot*, *La Vivandière*, *Fanfan la Tulipe*, and Théodore Botrel's *Le Couteau*. Among those who came to perform in front of her camera and her recording machines were Mayol, Dranem and Polin.

She didn't meanwhile lose interest in the silent film. In 1906, eager to film the bullfights at Nîmes, she decided to take advantage of the trip to film adaptations from Provençal literature. Feuillade, co-opted into the party as scriptwriter, was allowed to work on the direction of certain films (among them *Mireille*, after Frédéric Mistral) whenever the shooting involved practical difficulties for a woman. Such as? 'Climbing up into a tree, for instance,' Alice Guy explains. Although the first negative of *Mireille* was damaged, the month-long trip was both productive and agreeable. It was during this expedition that Alice Guy fell in love with the party's English cameraman. Herbert Blaché, and soon after she married him.

In 1907 Blaché was put in charge of Gaumont's New York office. Intending to accompany him, his wife gave up directing films and also had to resign from her post as artistic director for the Gaumont Company. Léon Gaumont thought he might find a replacement by enticing someone away from Pathé; specifically, he had Albert Cappellani in mind. But Alice Guy assured him that the man he needed was already working in his own company: Louis Feuillade. Gaumont took her advice, and the future director of *Les Vampires* took up his new position on April 1, 1907.

Gaumont's New York branch was on Congress Avenue, a long way from Manhattan in the suburb of Flushing. Just outside its doors there was open countryside: wild woods and lakes that seemed made for location shooting. But, unlike Pathé, Gaumont's foreign branches were not supposed to engage in production. The New York branch was set up to function as an agency and print laboratory, and Blaché's job was to show Gaumont productions to American exhibitors and to take orders for them. Paris would then send him the negatives, he would make however many copies he needed for the American market, title them in English, and return the negatives to La Villette.

After two years, during which she gave birth to a daughter and adapted to her new life, Alice Guy began to feel bored with life as a mere wife and mother. Nostalgic for her former profession, she had the idea of making for the American public films designed to its tastes and performed by American actors. Since Gaumont was unwilling to take the risks involved in foreign production, and her husband was under exclusive contract, she had to venture into business on her own. She did, in theory, have an outlet for her films: the clients her husband had contacted on Gaumont's behalf.

On September 7, 1910, the Solax Company was registered: president, Alice Blaché; business director, George A. Magie. Although the company had an office in Manhattan—147 Fourth Avenue, on the corner of 14th Street—it actually operated from the Gaumont building in Flushing, where Alice Guy used the print lab and commandeered a space for shooting interiors. The countryside around Flushing provided her locations. She engaged a cameraman, John Haas, who photographed most of her films; she got her chief designer and former collaborator on *La Vie de Jésus*, Henri Ménessier, to come over from Paris. From October 21, 1910 until June 1914, under its trademark of a blazing sun, the Solax Company produced some 325 films of assorted lengths and types. At least 35 of them were directed by the company's lady president,[3] the rest being made by Edward Warren, the company's principal director, and by Harry Schenk. Throughout Solax's existence, Alice Guy personally directed an average of one film a month.

Released on October 21, Solax's first production *A Child's Sacrifice* was made by Alice Guy, who would appear to have been thinking back to the good old days of *Les Petits Coupeurs de Bois Vert*. *A Child's Sacrifice* is the story of an 8-year-old girl (played by Magda Foy, the 'Solax Kid'). Her father is a worker out on strike and her mother is ill, so she tries to sell her doll to a junk-dealer. Seeing her distress, he buys the toy and then gives it back to her as a present. The little girl does not content herself with bringing a few pennies into the starving household; she also intervenes to prevent bloodshed in a quarrel provoked by the strike. Another of Alice Guy's successful melodramas, *Falling Leaves*, was distributed in France. It's the touching story of a little girl who believes she can stop her big sister dying of TB by going out into the garden at night and putting fallen leaves back on the branches: the doctor hints that the sister will die at the end of the autumn.

The director did not forget her recordings for the Chronophone: in 1912 she filmed two operas, *Mignon* and *Fra Diavolo*, both three-reelers with orchestral accompaniment. Nor did she lose interest in tougher subjects. Making good use of a trip to Washington, she shot a series of 'military scenes', most of which were really cowboy pictures. The woman who had directed *Les Apaches de Paris* and *Le Crime de la Rue du Temple* turned out for Solax such thrillers as *The Rogues of Paris*, *The Million Dollar Robbery* and *The Sewer*. The script for this last film was by her designer, Ménessier, who had no hesitation in digging trenches and pools in the undeveloped land around Flushing. One of the film's main attractions was an attack on the hero by genuine sewer rats, specially trained by an expert. The directress spared no effort or expense to achieve realism or sensational effects. To the great surprise of critics, who were not yet used to this type of thing, in March 1912 she set fire to a car in the studio yard ('a Darracq only three years old') for a crime story entitled *Mickey's Pal*. This scene was directed by Edward Warren at the express request of Herbert Blaché, who was somewhat alarmed at the prospect of his wife filming fires and acrobatics on the struts of the Brooklyn Bridge, using wild animals

[3] I have only been able to identify 35 of the films as hers, since films made before 1914 rarely carried credit titles. The total number of films made by Alice Guy for Solax was probably closer to 50.

and setting off explosions. He did allow her to have animals on the set in *The Beasts of the Jungle*, but he strictly forbade her to use dynamite, standing in for her as director on scenes of *The Yellow Traffic* which he considered too dangerous.

Alice Guy made two further excursions into the realm of the fantastic: *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Shadows of the Moulin Rouge*, both made in 1913. Looking back for the last time to the trick comedies of the heroic age of Gaumont, she introduced—with the collaboration of the indispensable Ménessier—a short animation sequence into a 1912 melodrama, *Hotel Honeymoon*, in which the moon came to life and smiled at the lovers. She may also have been the director of *In the Year 2000*, a satire in which women ruled the earth. In any case, it would have been consistent with her character and sense of humour.

From the beginning, the stars of the 'Solax Stock Company' were Blanche Cornwall and Darwin Karr, joined in 1913 by Vinnie Burns and Claire Whitney. Others in the company included Lee Beggs, Mace Greenleaf, Marion Swayne and Billy Quirk, who specialised in comedy and was the hero of the 'Billy' series.

At first Alice Guy tried not to draw attention to her unique position as the world's only woman film director: a sensible precaution in the face of a *milieu* where skill in manipulating stock clichés was more appreciated than intuition or sensitivity. But when they discovered her existence, the trade press took an attentive interest in this charming Frenchwoman whose gentleness on the set disguised such astonishing energy. Delighted by the touch of exoticism she brought to them, they published her photo. In evening dress. In her working clothes: with a megaphone in her hand, protected from the sun by an immense hood, standing on a piece of scaffolding to direct a scene from *Fra Diavolo*. They reported every word and gesture of the woman whom they called not Mrs. Blaché but—*toujours la politesse*—Madame Blaché. When she visited Sing Sing on a reconnaissance trip, they photographed her sitting in the famous electric chair and quoted her as saying: 'French prisons are much more comfortable, particularly the one at Fresnes.' (Heavens! How did she know?) They were fond of repeating that, according to 'Madame Blaché', French children show an innate feeling for acting even before they are out of their rompers. But the Americans can catch up with them by hard work.

In point of fact, Solax was highly successful. Its films were popular and sold well. Consequently, in January 1912 she was able to announce that she had acquired a site on the other side of the Hudson, on Palisades Avenue at Fort Lee, where she was planning to build a modern studio. Along with the Pathé studio and Eclair, where Etienne Arnaud had just arrived, Solax helped to make Fort Lee the capital of a Franco-American cinema. The new building, which contained a large studio with two-storey-high glass windows facing south, was equipped with a laboratory capable of printing 16,000 feet of positive film a day. And meanwhile on February 3, 1912, at Weber's Theatre on Broadway, Solax organised its first gala evening, attended by everyone from the New York film world.

Herbert Blaché, who was still running Gaumont's New York office, was every bit as dynamic as his wife and was a great help in marketing her films. In May 1912 he became leader of a group of independents who were determined to put up some kind of active resistance to the Edison Trust, which was uncooperative or worse in its dealings with them. He founded a distribution company, the Film Supply Company, and became its president until it was merged in 1914 with the Mutual Company (although Mutual was later to produce Chaplin's films, it was at this time still exclusively a distribution company). In addition to Solax's pictures, the Film Supply Company distributed films made by Thanhouse, Great Northern, Majestic, Comet, Reliance and the American Film Company, as well as the films of several French companies—Gaumont, Lux, Eclair, Eclair American, and Le Film d'Art.

Almost as soon as he was released from his exclusive contract to Gaumont in October 1913, Herbert Blaché founded and became president of Blaché Features Inc. (vice-president: Alice Guy). It soon replaced Solax, which ceased its bi-weekly productions on October 31. But five Solax films which were already under way were distributed under the old label at the rate of one a month. Unlike Solax, the new company made only dramas—especially adventure stories—and these were a minimum of four reels long. Alice Guy inaugurated the production side of the company on November 17 with *The Star of India*. Of the fourteen films made by Blaché Features Inc. from November 1913 until its disappearance in November 1914, nine were made by her; the others were directed by Harry Schenk or by Blaché himself.

With his indomitable passion for founding companies, Blaché set up a new one in April 1914 with a capital of $500,000. The U.S. Amusement Corporation: vice-president Alice Guy; managing director, Joseph M. Shear. The aims of the company were set out by its president in a manifesto entitled *The Life of a Photodrama*: the time had come to acknowledge the development of the cinema, to make it more of an art form and to produce masterpieces. One could achieve this by adapting literary classics neglected by the cinema. Or one could do it less expensively and with less risk by bringing stage adaptations to the screen. In practical terms, this meant that the company was proposing mainly to adapt plays which would be performed—and this was the innovatory part of the project—by actors who had successfully appeared in them on the stage. This concern with quality and culture struck a new note in the materialist American cinema; the scheme also offered all the disadvantages which Feuillade had vigorously denounced as early as 1911, at the time of his attacks on 'Le Film d'Art' and 'La Société Cinématographique des Auteurs et Gens de Lettres'. Namely, the death of the original script and the takeover of the cinema by the theatre.

The company's series of 'art films', most of which were directed by Herbert Blaché, was inaugurated in September 1914 with a production of *The Chimes*, based on Dickens. This was followed by *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *The Burglar and the Lady* (from a melodrama by Langdon McCormack), etc...

Alice Guy's contribution to the activities of the U.S. Amusement Corporation was represented by three films released early in 1917: *The Adventurer* (from the novel by Upton Sinclair), *The Empress*, and *A Man and the Woman* (based on Zola's *Nana*). From January 1917, the former Solax studio at Fort Lee was rented by Blaché to Apollo Pictures; its subsequent tenants, before it was sold and pulled down around 1920, included Albert Cappellani.

Meanwhile, from October 1914 until August 1917, Alice Guy directed some ten five-reelers and supervised the production of a dozen others for a company whose first appearance coincided with the disappearance of Blaché Features Inc. and whose aims seem to have been a carbon-copy of the U.S. Amusement Corporation. The company was called Popular Players and Plays: president, L. Lawrence Weber; managing director, Harry J. Cohen; and director of production, Herbert Blaché. All of the films which Alice Guy directed for this company were adapted from stage plays (*The Ragged Earl*, *The Tigress*), novels (*Michael Strogoff*, *What Will People Say?*) or, in one case, a poem (*My Madonna*, based on *The Call of the Yukon* by Robert Service). Most of them starred one of the first 'vamps', the Russian dancer Olga Petrova.

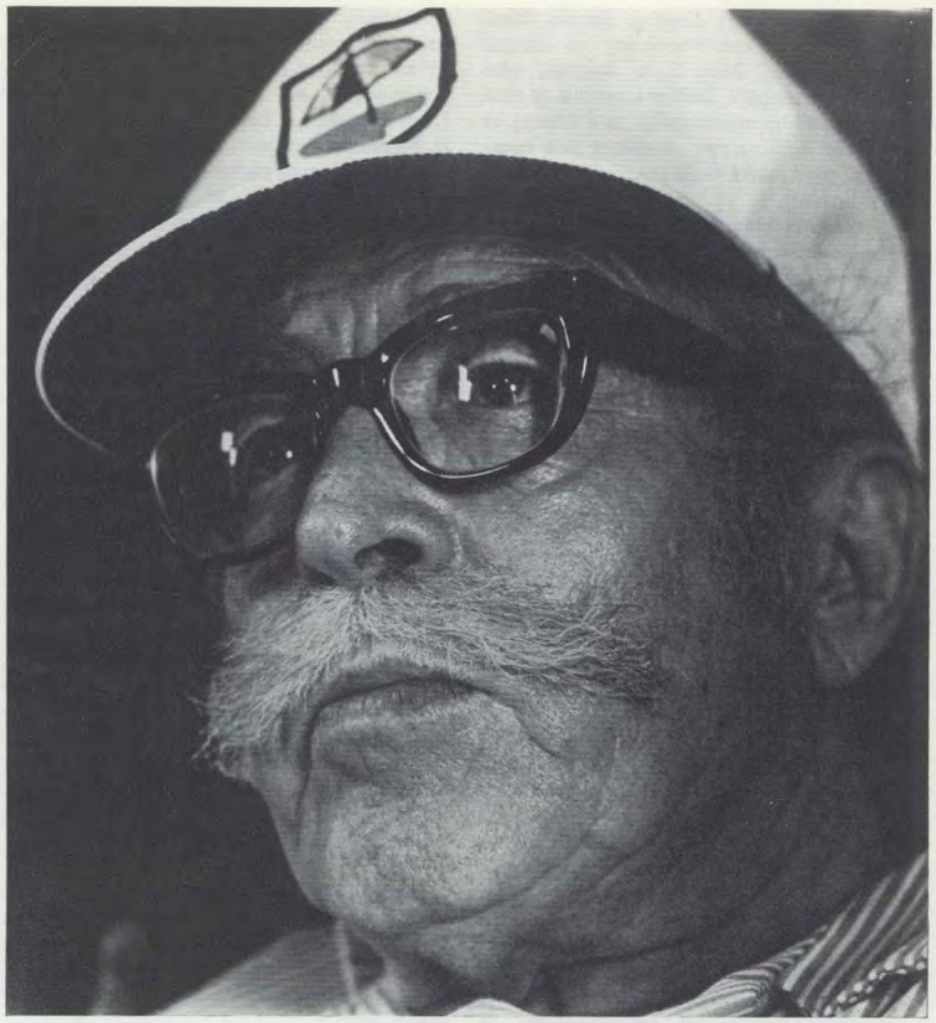
It is curious to note that it was the Blachés who helped Metro Pictures (which, after mergers, became Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) to get off the ground, by entrusting them from their inception in March 1915 right up until 1918 with their various productions, thereby providing them, over a two-year period, with most of their output as distributors: a humble and unintentional contribution to the birth of a giant. But the Blachés' departure from their Fort Lee studio signified the end of an era. By 1917 it was already impossible for independents to survive and the future belonged to the big companies, as the Blachés were to discover to their cost. Pathé Exchange released Alice Guy's last two films: *The Great Adventure*, with Bessie Love, in March 1918; and *Tarnished Reputation*, based on a screenplay by Léonce Perret, in June 1920. Her husband, however, obtained a reprieve. In 1920 he directed Buster Keaton's first feature, *The Saphead*, and Ethel Barrymore's first film, *The Hope*. In 1923 he joined Universal, becoming their production director in 1925 and supervising, among other things, all the Hoot Gibson Westerns. He left the cinema in 1929 with the coming of sound.

The pioneer days of the New York cinema were gone for good. And the passers-by glancing into the window of a small lampshade shop in downtown Los Angeles little suspected that its owners had been pioneers of both the French and the American cinema. The French attributed Alice Guy's films to Jasset or to Cohl. And the Americans had quite forgotten that 'refined Frenchwoman Madame Blaché'. In a recent interview about her one film as director, Lillian Gish remembered quite clearly that before her own venture there had been a Frenchman whose wife had also directed films. But the name completely escaped her. ■

This article is taken from a forthcoming book: 'Le 7ème Art au Féminin. Les femmes et la mise en scène de 1895 à 1930'.

Onwards and Upwards with Dalton Trumbo

Axel Madsen



James Cagney's voice on the radio performing Arch Oboler's version of *Johnny Got His Gun* in 1939 shook an America on the threshhold of World War II. Thirty-two years later, an America perhaps in the throes of peace is to discover a film version of Dalton Trumbo's chilling tale of the doughboy who lost all limbs and senses and banged his half shot-off head against his pillow in Morse code in an appeal to doctors and nurses to kill him. In a mad and majestic sense, the story of the Johnny who got his gun and its author's own travel to the end of the night are a trajectory and a parable of the artist—here the film writer—in a turbulent half-century.

James Dalton Trumbo is reaping overdue vindication, if not sweet revenge. Dressed in a jumpsuit and sporting a flaring Grenadier Guards moustache, he roams the film capitals, at 66 the world's oldest debutant film-maker, while at home the media use the publication of twenty years of Trumbo letters as a pretext to cheer a writer's exemplary journey from popular front to radical chic, a 'progressive's' steadfast rectitude. One week Trumbo is in Mexico City, showing his film *Johnny Got His Gun* to his old friend Luis Buñuel, who once was to have directed it. Another week, he is in London and Paris for other screenings; then back for redubbing a couple of scenes with young Timothy Bottoms, his screen Johnny. Between trips, Trumbo can be seen at Hollywood anti-war rallies.

Last year, the Writers Guild of America gave its top award for achievement in screen-writing to the former outcast, who told the dinner honouring him the much-quoted warning to younger writers looking back with curiosity on the era of the blacklist. 'It will do no good to search for villains or heroes or saints or devils because there were none; there were only victims.' This year, it is Richard Schickel writing that of all the books on film, only *Additional Dialogue* gives 'a sense of what it is like to live and work in Hollywood.' And Murray Kempton compares the Trumbo letters to Thoreau's *Journals*, writing: 'We have memoirs of a thousand scoundrels to enjoy; but the intimacies of a man of honour are precious and rare.'

It was Thanksgiving morning 1947 when a haggard Sam Zimbalist, who had produced the Trumbo script *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, stumbled into Dalton and Cleo's ranch kitchen saying, 'It's all over, Dalton. The producers have met in secret at the Waldorf and decided on the blacklist. How can I help you?'

The history of the first post-war years is still being reappraised. Recent *New York Review of Books* critiques of a host of new books on the McCarthy era itch to 'go one note higher than the top note of the piano', seeing the late senator as an ogre but behind him President Harry Truman—although history may ultimately agree on extenuating circumstances. The Stalinist coup in Czechoslovakia; the realisation that the U.S.A. would have to take over Britain's place as a shield against Communism in Greece and Turkey; the Berlin blockade; the Gouzenko spy case in Canada; the Hiss-Chambers case . . . Truman sought the advice of Arthur Vandenberg, the only paladin he could trust in the Senate. Vandenberg's counsel is famous: 'Scare the hell out of the country, Harry.' Truman's course was set when he established his Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty in November 1946, when he needed not only spiritual but tactical backing for the devil theory of Communism. He was to regret the excesses four years later, when the anti-red hysteria had produced not only McCarthy but McCarthyism.

Not to be outdone, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) remembered pre-war Hollywood radicalism, the near-underground organising of the Screen Writers Guild, and the Federal Theatre and Writers Project, which HUAC chairman J. Parnell Thomas had termed 'sheer propaganda for Communism or the New Deal.' The Hollywood hearings of October 1947 gave HUAC what it needed most—publicity. Among the all-star cast there was the impeccably tailored Adolphe Menjou telling committee member Richard Nixon that anyone who would listen to Paul Robeson 'singing his Communist songs' ought to be ashamed; and Robert Taylor defending himself by declaring that 'Roosevelt aides' had instructed him to play

in the M-G-M 1943 *Song of Russia*. Most memorable was the testimony of Ginger Rogers' mother, Mrs. Lela Rogers, who criticised Trumbo's *Tender Comrade* (a title from Tennyson incidentally, not Marx) as subversive because her daughter was compelled to say: 'Share and share alike—that's democracy.'

Of the nineteen 'unfriendly' witnesses, only eleven were actually called to the stand—the Ten plus Bertold Brecht, who in some celebrated exchanges completely bewildered the committee. Some of the best material never got a hearing because testimony of the Ten was barred, although Trumbo managed to yell into network microphones that this was the beginning of concentration camps in America, and John Howard Lawson to shout: 'I'm not on trial here, Mr. Chairman. This committee is on trial before the American people. Let's get that straight.' Ring Lardner, Jr., who twenty-two years later was to write M*A*S*H, was forcibly ejected.

Meeting at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York, the studio heads agreed on a blacklist, which eventually grew to about 250 names; and on December 5 a Washington grand jury indicted the Ten for contempt of Congress. In June, 1950, they all went to jail after the Supreme Court, peppered with some of the most eloquent briefs in legal annals and pleas from everyone from Laurence Olivier to George Bernard Shaw, refused to review the appeals of Trumbo and Lawson. The Ten had one wonderful moment: to the Danbury Penitentiary in Connecticut where Lardner and Lester Cole served their sentences was sent HUAC Chairman Thomas for embezzlement of public funds. Trumbo served his ten months in the Federal Correctional Institute in Ashland, Kentucky.

The climb back was arduous. Trumbo had gone from an M-G-M contract, which gave him the choice of $3,000 a week for as long as it took him to finish a script, or a flat $75,000 for each screenplay, to instant destitution. M-G-M, Warner Brothers, Columbia and Universal eventually settled the suits of Trumbo and Cole (with Lardner at Fox, Edward Dmytryk and Adrian Scott at RKO, the only five actually under contract in October 1947); but the Ten had spent a quarter of a million dollars in three years in the courts. In 1955, 20th Century-Fox finally settled Lardner's breach of contract suit for $10,000—the only individual victory. With the exception of Dmytryk, who recanted after his release from prison, all had to try to survive on a black market, where credits were pseudonymous and the bargaining positions the weakest.

Trumbo had written one screenplay while serving his sentence. After prison, he sold his ranch and moved his family to Mexico City; and he continued to write—under nine aliases—a total of 18 scripts. One of them was the script for *The Brave One*, a *cause célèbre* when in 1957 it won an Oscar for its supposed writer, the elusive Robert Rich. For two years, Trumbo coyly declined to confirm that he was himself Mr. Rich. In 1954, the Trumbos moved back to California.

As Geoffrey Wolf wrote recently, the blacklist 'died of terminal stupidity' around 1960. Trumbo was the first writer up from the underground. Kirk Douglas was instrumental in getting him a screen credit on *Spartacus*, but it was the crafty Otto Preminger who stole the publicity thunder by announcing that Trumbo was to be his screenwriter on *Exodus*. The American Legion picketed both films (Senator John F. Kennedy was one of the few legislators to brave the cinema pickets); but the two films were too successful at the box-office, as Trumbo shrewdly foresaw, and the Legion grip was broken. Douglas then hired Trumbo to write, or rewrite, *The Last Sunset*, *Lonely Are The Brave*, *Town Without Pity* and the never filmed *Montezuma*. Dino De Laurentiis paid Trumbo $200,000 to script *Dark Angel*; Martin Ransohoff hired him and Michael Wilson, another blacklistee (pseudonymous co-scriptwriter with Carl Foreman of *Bridge on the River Kwai*), to do *The Sandpiper*, while the Mirisch Brothers and United Artists had him write several thousand pages of *Hawaii*. For Peter O'Toole, Joseph Levine engaged him to write *Will Adams*, the story of the only English samurai warrior, still awaiting proper financing. Trumbo wrote the script of *The Fixer* and has ready to go *Gabriella, Cloves and Cinnamon*, an adaptation of the Brazilian author Jorge Amado's 1920s coffee-town revolt story.

Today, Trumbo talks about the blacklist as a man peering back into another century. He is without remorse or regret and says he bears no grudges.

It is at his hillside home above the Sunset Strip that one Saturday afternoon I catch up with the tireless writer and now director. *Johnny Got His Gun* is foremost on his mind, and my first question is why *Johnny* after so many years?

'Because . . . because seventeen studios turned it down, convinced it couldn't be done.' More seriously he adds that he felt it should be made. 'I wrote it 32 years ago; the book has had a life of its own. It has been translated into sixteen languages—Portuguese was the latest. It's a book I like and it is being discovered by today's young. Buñuel was to have made it nine years ago, but our producer Gustavo Alatriste—he produced *Simon of the Desert*—ran out of money. Funny, when I showed it to Buñuel the other day, he said: "I like the scene where the nurse tries to kill him." And I said: "That's *your* scene!" '

'Johnny Got His Gun'

Trumbo had read the story of a British major who died in 1932 in a hospital where he had been since 1917. The precise nature of his wounds was never revealed; he had been locked up in a secret room, where the Prince of Wales had once apparently insisted on seeing him. The Prince was said to have left the room in tears; the only way one could communicate with the major was by kissing his forehead. Trumbo wrote the story in 1939 and finished it three days before the declaration of war.

Working under the union agreement for productions costing less than a million dollars, Trumbo shot his film in California. His actors, Marsha Hunt, Jason Robards, Donald Sutherland and Timothy Bottoms, worked on deferred salaries. *Johnny* is not an easy film. Trumbo has refused the freeze-frame and other optical devices, but he flashes back to Johnny's past and to some Felliniesque fantasies in an amateurish manner. And the role of the ever-present Johnny (particularly in the long interior monologues once he is reduced to a stump of a man, blind, deaf, without arms, legs and voice) is probably too exacting for a neophyte actor. It is the kind of film that one hopes is not Trumbo's legacy, but the beginning of a new career for a man full of savage and plain talk, of humour and self-deprecation.

Our conversation drifts, inevitably, toward the Vietnam war, and the art of screenwriting in a changing medium. I ask him if he has ever thought of writing a Vietnam war movie and he says no anti-war war movie can be made. Home-front stories of conflict, perhaps, but not a war movie in the sense of the battle fury of *them* going over the hilltop to get *us*. To make such an American film is not even left-wing masochism but absurd. 'If I were a studio head, I'd turn down such a project. The question is not what can be made but what can make money. You can make a film about boiled babies if people will go to see it. It's a matter of point of view. A Hanoi point of view in an American film is, innately, absurd.'

As always, the problem facing creative people in films is the one of what *can* be made. Trumbo feels that the present fragmentation of the industry does offer more opportunities, although it would be wrong to say that the screenwriter's lot is really different today. 'I can only speak for myself. People ask me: "Do you work more closely with a director nowadays?" No, I don't and I don't think it would be healthy. I feel that the first draft of a script should be done by the writer, completely independent of anyone once the subject matter is agreed upon. That's how they get the most from me. I have had my say, now I'm wide open to suggestions.'

I ask him why the film of *The Fixer* was such a disappointment. Trumbo suspects that the reasons were his own and John Frankenheimer's respect for Bernard Malamud's novel, as well as the final cutting, which left out sequences that could have balanced the picture of the persecution of the Kiev Jew. 'Malamud is a respected novelist and we just never dared to change too much, although there were scenes written—and shot—showing Bok in happier circumstances. As it finally came out on the screen, it was two hours of unremitting cruelty.'

Trumbo had no qualms when adapting Howard Fast's *Spartacus*. 'The project was complicated, Stanley Kubrick came in very late replacing Anthony Mann, and because of the blacklist I was sneaked in. Funny, but Stanley had read Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiator*, which of course is a much better book, and as I watched the rushes I saw strange things get into the film. I had to tell him: "Look, Stanley, that sort of thing just isn't legal." ' Working with Preminger was a pleasure. Here, they 'cheerfully chopped' into Leon Uris' novel, excising the early love story of the book. Trumbo never really worked either with Robert Aldrich on *The Last Sunset*, or with David Miller on *Lonely Are The Brave*.

The future still looks bright, if 'we can get the cost of the whole thing down.' Trumbo feels the rough times the cinema is going through are salutary. He admires Arthur Penn, Sydney Pollack, Lindsay Anderson, François Truffaut and 'above all, Buñuel'. 'Also, the younger generation. They break the rules, often without knowing the rules are there, which is funny.'

The Trumbo Letters

Reviewed by Philip French

Collections of correspondence by living authors appear infrequently to say the least. But we live in an age when American universities, in order to provide material for present prestige and future scholarship, compete with each other to acquire everything from obscure poets' manuscripts to celebrated novelists' cheque-stubs. And so we should not be too astonished that the academic lady who undertook 'the task of organising the newly acquired scripts, records and papers of Dalton Trumbo' for the Wisconsin Centre for Theatre Research should have decided—with Trumbo's initially reluctant agreement—to prise open her time capsule prematurely. The 'Swifty' adverb 'manfully' can hardly be resisted in describing the way Dr. Helen Manfull has gone about the job of arranging and annotating a hefty 576-page book of letters covering the years 1942 to 1962, from the time Trumbo became a contract writer at M-G-M to two years after his name came off Hollywood's blacklist.*

From the letters, together with the editor's biographical introductions to each section and copious footnotes, we learn a great deal about Trumbo's life and career; and we're left in no doubt that Dr. Manfull regards her subject as a hero of our times. As Axel Madsen writes about the life elsewhere in this issue, I shall restrict myself to observing that I find the life of some interest and to noting that the same career details are repeated over and over again in the book. This latter point is worth making, for the repetition results not from chance but rather because Trumbo was forced by circumstance (perhaps also by temperament) to invoke his own and his wife's impressive pedigrees and lives of impeccable devotion to good American causes in the face of the continuing (and ludicrous) charge that they were conspirators, traitors, Un-Americans. He was, and is, very much in the American grain, not merely of dissent and rhetorical idealism but also of commitment to social and commercial success. *Additional Dialogue* is an odd book, alternately informative and boring, enlightening and irritating. Trumbo will no doubt take up one of the many invitations to write an autobiography, but the present book for all its shortcomings and frustrations for the reader catches a life and a time upon the wing and is revealing in ways a formal autobiography might not be.

Let me say right away that Trumbo emerges as a generous, honest, amusing man, a firm friend, a trustworthy employee, an admirable husband, a lovably understanding father, as modest in times of good fortune as he is cheerful and resilient in adversity. One cannot easily fault, on the evidence provided here, the way he conducted his public and private lives. He was treated appallingly by the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Hollywood community, numerous vindictive pressure groups and the press. They turned him into a martyr. As he never chose this role it might be unfair to say that the arrows on his prison garb could well have formed the cross-bars to equally symbolic dollar signs. Unfair perhaps, but nevertheless not entirely unjust. The subject of money runs right through the book, from the first letter informing his agent that his raise at M-G-M was secured just before the wartime salary freeze to the very last professional letter when he adds up the grosses of *Spartacus* and *Exodus* which took him off the blacklist.

Maybe one shouldn't labour this aspect: Jane Austen once said that love and money were the only two subjects worth writing about, and in their work and particularly in their correspondence authors have always been obsessed with money, usually to the embarrassment of their admirers. Nevertheless, the subject is crucial for several reasons. First, because Trumbo, by electing to take a moral stand against HUAC in 1947, deliberately courted financial loss; for this we must respect him. Secondly, because most of the work he has done in Hollywood has been conditioned by financial considerations. Thirdly, because he became and continues to be trapped by a way of life that depends upon an income beyond the wildest dreams of most of his fellow citizens and fellow writers. Even in his worst years during the blacklisting of the Fifties, he was making, or aiming to make, an annual sum that would put him into an income bracket occupied by about half a per cent of wage-earning Americans.

Such aspirations, one must readily admit, are not necessarily to be sneered at; they might even be considered his birthright. And he knew how to produce the scripts to realise them. For obvious economic if not artistic reasons, he preferred to adapt other men's novels for the Hollywood mill; one might infer further that he doesn't much care to transpose works of real literary quality—he attributes the failure of *The Fixer* to his own and Frankenheimer's exaggerated respect for the Malamud novel. When driven to it during the Fifties, he could of course turn out opportunistic original stories. For instance, in a letter to Nelson Algren suggesting that he might submit such scripts on a sharing basis under the name of the novelist, Trumbo remarks:

> 'I am obliged to warn you in advance that an original story, designed for sale on the local market, involves a combination of prose and construction and sentimentality and vulgarity that appals even me, who am used to it, and would appal you even more. The only thing which makes it possible for a self-respecting writer to engage in such enterprise is that the story is never published and read only in Hollywood.'

The letters are invaluable to the social historian in explaining how the black market in bootleg scripts worked, and there is first-hand material on the role Trumbo played in bringing that desperate state of affairs to an end. But always the background music is a cash-register obbligato rather than a muted orchestration of 'The Red Flag' or 'The Internationale'. The blacklist will end as a result of commercially successful films scripted by banned writers, he suggests, in a 1959 letter on the eve of the appearance of blockbusters scripted by himself and after the appearance of Academy Award winning movies like *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *The Defiant Ones* written under pseudonyms; previously he had been of the opinion that big-budget films were inimical to the cause of the bootleggers. Trumbo's European admirers will be more than a little disturbed to read of his high regard for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the importance he attaches to their prizes. They might also be surprised to find that back in the early Fifties he turned down an invitation from his fellow Hollywood Ten member Herbert Biberman to script a left-wing movie (presumably *Salt of the Earth*), saying:

> 'I am, from today on and for some time in the future, not interested in pamphlets, speeches or progressive motion pictures. I have got to earn money—a considerable sum of it—very quickly. I cannot and will not hypothecate two or three months, or even a month, for any project that doesn't contain the possibility of an immediate and substantial sum. Once I have earned the money, once I have sold the ranch, once I am in a position where the slightest mishap no longer places me in peril, I shall again function as I should like to. But this is well in the future.'

Plain speaking, but hardly the attitude of a Pasternak or a Solzhenitsyn.

What then of Trumbo's political opinions? Not until page 435, and in a footnote, are we told that he joined the Communist Party in 1943 and left in 1948 'on the ground that I should in future be too busy to attend its meetings, which were, in any event, dull beyond description and about as revolutionary in purpose as Wednesday evening testimonial services in the Christian Science Church.' In a characteristically quixotic manner, he rejoined the Party for a few months on his return from Mexican exile in 1954 in order to protest the Smith Act and express his solidarity with its Californian victims. He had, he says, always told his producers about his political views, but

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**Additional Dialogue: Letters of Dalton Trumbo, 1942-1962.* Edited by Helen Manfull. (M. Evans and Co., New York, $12.50)

Going Between

Tea at Brandham Hall

Richard Roud

The best recipe for a successful marriage of minds—as for any other kind—is naturally that the partners should have much in common. It is equally important, however, that they should be dissimilar in as many ways as they are alike. These two qualifications are abundantly fulfilled in the collaboration of Joseph Losey and Harold Pinter. They are alike in that both are outsiders. Neither was born into the kind of English aristocratic or upper middle-class world their films describe. Losey is, of course, American, and therefore out of the running. Pinter, though English, was neither born nor educated in the kind of world which fascinates both him and Losey—at least when they are working together. For it is curious that when Pinter is on his own, he deals with a seedy world of derelicts, outsiders, tramps. And when Losey is on his own, the milieu of his films is seldom the same as in the films he does with Pinter.

Together, if not separately, both men seem fascinated by the possibilities offered by a depiction of a privileged world, from the smart Chelsea house of *The Servant* to the spires of Oxford and now, in *The Go-Between*, the splendours of upper-class life at the turn of the century. Such a world offers the film-maker and scriptwriter many advantages. For one thing, it provides the best kind of setting for that portrayal of the differences between appearance and reality that interest both men. In *The Go-Between* everything in the garden, in the house is lovely; it is only underneath the white muslin dresses that beat the savage hearts, and Losey and Pinter burrow beneath the veneer of a civilisation of manners to lay bare what lies there.

Mrs. Maudsley (Margaret Leighton) seems at first the perfect hostess, well-bred, cultivated, delightful. It is only as the film progresses that we see beneath that surface to her sexual jealousy of her daughter, her determination that Marian should make a suitable match, and that scandal must at all costs be avoided. And it is precisely because people like Mrs. Maudsley impose restraints on themselves—in the name of 'good form'—that they are so tempting for Losey and Pinter; for in this contrast between behaviour and desires lies the essence of drama. Throughout the film there runs a secondary thread, this battle of wills between mother and daughter which is all the more gripping because it is expressed only in guarded looks, conversational gambits, and raised eyebrows.

Another advantage of this kind of milieu is that it allows for concentration: no one has to go to work, and the action of the film can be compressed. This links up with Losey's and Pinter's experience in the theatre. Pinter, of course, is both playwright and actor; but Losey, too, began his career on the stage, and it was only after eighteen years in the theatre that he began work in films. Therefore (or is it vice versa?) both men are fascinated by closed universes. The Pinter rooms, to be sure; but most of Losey's films, too, are studies of small worlds—the two characters of *Figures in a Landscape*, the house in *Secret Ceremony*, the prison in *The Criminal*, the island in *Boom*. Because of this need to concentrate, to crystallise, we have yet another reason why the Losey-Pinter films prefer upper-class settings. And because they have imposed spatial limits on themselves, they are naturally tempted to play tricks with time; to compensate, as it were, for the smallness of their stage.

It has often been remarked that Losey and Pinter share, above all, a certain tendency to misogyny. This, I think, is true of the two men individually. One has only to think back to the treatment of the woman in *The Homecoming* or to Losey's portrayal of Susan Gilvray in *The Prowler*, or the character Jeanne Moreau plays in *Eve*. However, in the films the two have made together another element seems more important. The female characters *are* often predatory. Anna, in *Accident*, chalks up a death (William) and two very unhappy men (Stephen and Charlie). In *The Go-Between*, Marian Maudsley betters this record with a suicide (Ted Burgess) and two ruined lives (Leo and Trimingham). But the fact that the Sarah Miles character in *The Servant* is only an accessory to the downfall of Tony indicates that what concerns Losey and Pinter is less the destructive female than the self-destructive male. They are simply saying that when men give themselves up entirely to their sexual obsessions, they are in fact committing a kind of suicide. The Servant destroys the master by pandering to his lusts and weaknesses. Anna is not really *responsible* for the havoc wreaked around her: that must in all honesty be put down to the self-indulgence of the men. Marian, in *The Go-Between*, is selfish and reasonably heartless, but the men all *want* to be walked over.

Leo is too young to be aware of the nature of Marian's relationship with Farmer Ted; nonetheless he is aware that he is somehow betraying the Maudsleys' hospitality by carrying the secret messages between the Hall and the Farm. But he is so pleased by the self-importance given him by his function as messenger that even when he begins to suspect that Marian is only using him, that she does not really care for him, he blinds himself to this knowledge. Lord Trimingham, Marian's fiancé, suspects, as does everyone except Leo, that Marian is having an affair with Ted; yet he closes his eyes, goes through with the marriage, and accepts Ted's child as his own with never a word of reproach. Ted knows that Marian is using him sexually, just as she is using Leo as messenger; he knows she will never marry him. And when the scandal breaks, Ted commits suicide, presumably to save Marian from further embarrassment. Leo, far from harbouring any vindictive thoughts towards Marian for having embroiled him in a situation which is to leave him an emotional vegetable, remains true to her to the end. And Trimingham? 'Hugh was as true as steel. He wouldn't hear a word against me. But everybody wanted to know us, of course. I was Lady Trimingham, you see, I still am. There is no other.'

Losey and Pinter, then, are united more by their understanding of man's self-destructive instincts, his masochistic vulnerability, his over-dependence on sex, than by any form of misogyny. Their men 'fly too near the sun', and they get scorched. Which is perhaps just another way of saying that both Losey and Pinter share what is generally called a tragic view of life.

But if their background, psychology, and preoccupations are often similar, their differences as artists are equally important. Losey is generally thought of as baroque, and his visual style is indeed often complex and convoluted. Pinter, on the other hand,

specialises in monosyllables, in deceptive simplicity. Where Losey has occasionally been led by his exuberant temperament to overdo effects, Pinter is more of a miniaturist, using tiny brush strokes to make up his canvas. If the tempo of Pinter's plays could be described as *moderato assai*, Losey often prefers an invigorating *allegro furioso*. Finally, if Losey has in the past tended towards explicit social comment, Pinter in his plays has fought shy of statement of any sort. Day and night, one could say; but day and night do of course meet in a twilight zone, and it is in that late afternoon of the 19th century that *The Go-Between* is set, one of those beautiful Edwardian summers like the one we are told preceded the outbreak of the war in 1914.

And indeed in the beginning of the film, hostilities are about to break out at Brandham Hall. 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there . . .' Marian is engaged to Lord Trimingham; at the same time she is carrying on a passionate affair with Ted Burgess, a farmer on the estate. Everyone knows, or suspects it; no one says a word about it. Into this charged atmosphere, fate brings young Leo Colston, a boy from a shabby-genteel home invited by a richer schoolmate for the summer hols. Leo, like Losey and Pinter, like us, in fact, cannot help but be seduced by life as it is lived at the Hall. The charm of the Maudsley family is irresistible. During the course of the film, however, we gradually discover that beneath the surface blandishments, beneath the formal pleasures of tennis and tea, and above all, cricket, there lies something far less pleasant. And the tragic irony lies in the fact that while we see it all, poor Leo, blinded by his vanity and pleasure at being taken up, sees nothing.

In order for this contrast between appearance and reality to work, the surface has to be as alluring as possible. And it is. Gerry Fisher, whose photography of Oxford made of it some impossible dream of romantic spires, here makes Brandham Hall and the surrounding Norfolk countryside achingly, nostalgically beautiful, the essence of an English summer as old colonials must have dreamed of it. Carmen Dillon, whose art direction for *Accident* was so accurate, here works miracles, so that we feel, as does Leo, that the people who inhabit such beautiful rooms, wear such beautiful clothes, must also have beautiful souls.

But, above all, the acting is centrally necessary to keep up this illusion, and Margaret Leighton and Michael Gough as Marian's parents, and Edward Fox as Trimingham, succeed strikingly in creating the illusion of being truly well-bred that so much impresses little Leo. Alan Bates, good as he is as Ted, is no match for them; nor is Julie Christie. Only Dominic Guard, as Leo, amazingly holds his own against such competition. And when, towards the end, the masks come off, Margaret Leighton breaks up terrifyingly: the charm and beauty gone, she becomes a Fury. Even Leo suddenly becomes dimly aware of the abyss into which he—and they—have fallen.

One of the reasons why I prefer *The Go-Between* to the earlier Losey-Pinter films is its greater scope, its broader canvas. Like all their films, it is an adaptation, but whereas *The Servant* and even *Accident* were fairly short novels, L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* is a full-length work, if anything psychologically over-elaborated. And, therefore, it makes a much better subject for what I think of as the Losey-Pinter dialectic, their two-fold process of analysis and synthesis. First, the original material is scraped down, all excrescences chiselled away, so that the original screenplay is not just a condensed version of the novel, but something more like a quintessence. (One can imagine L. P. Hartley, like the cow in the old Oxo ad, looking at the tiny cube and saying, 'Goodness, *me*?') And once Pinter (or Pinter and Losey—it is not important who did just what: we know they work closely together) has reduced the novel to its essence, then the work of the director is, in a sense, to blow it up again, to restore the novelistic density, the texture, the life by cinematic means.

For example, the novel of *The Go-Between* begins with a prologue in which Leo Colston, now grown old, comes across a youthful diary. The main part of the novel is concerned with the evocation of the fatal summer at Brandham Hall. The book ends with an epilogue in which we discover what the effect of that traumatic summer was, what kind of man Leo has become, and it closes with Leo's return to the Norfolk village. The film gets rid of both prologue and epilogue; instead, there is a double articulation of time: as the story of the summer runs along, it is interrupted from time to time—at first only by occasional flashes, later by longer scenes, of Colston arriving in Norwich *now*, making his way to the village, meeting Marian's grandson, and finally being asked by Marian to do one more errand, for the last time to act as go-between.

The effect of this playing with time is more intense, even, than in *Accident*. For at first, we feel terribly uneasy; what are those strange flashes? Who is that grey old man? What are these modern cars doing here? Only slowly do we realise that this man (Michael Redgrave) *must* be young Leo grown old; and in a strange way, this gradual discovery counterpoints our gradual discovery of the realities of the Maudsley household. While we are penetrating the reality which lies beneath the charming exterior, we are also finding out what the effect of Leo's ultimate discovery has been—through Colston's sloping shoulders and deadened features.

But Losey and Pinter have done more than simply translate the novel into film terms; they have added much themselves. Pinter, for example, has not written much new dialogue; he has contented himself with 'adapting' it. But what he has done, often only by cutting a word or a line here and there, is to create his own very special brand of what the Greeks called stichomythia, that achieving of rhythm and speed through alternation:

TED: She cried when she couldn't see me.
LEO: How do you know?
TED: Because she cried when she did see me.

And this sense of movement which contrasts with the sultry summer heat is achieved by Losey in other ways. He has commissioned from Michel Legrand an extraordinary score—a formal set of variations for piano and orchestra in what could be described as a Bach-Stravinsky style, and he uses it in a formal way, too. No question of the music underlying certain scenes or trying to express emotions: no, it is used almost autonomously to punctuate the film, and, more important, to give it shape and impetus. And the music's driving *ostinato* parallels the tremendously exciting forward movement of the camerawork and the editing. Which may have been suggested by Leo's activities as messenger: Trimingham compares him to Mercury, the messenger of the gods, and the film's frenzied movement could also be described as mercurial.

Take the opening shots: we begin with a fast tracking shot laterally following the carriage bringing the two boys to Brandham Hall. We then cut to a long shot of the carriage moving across the screen from left to right, and at the same time, as one of the boys rises to grab at some leaves from a branch, the camera moves (or zooms) in towards them. This compounding of movement gives a breathless start to the film, plunging us into this new world in much the same way as Leo must have been plunged into a world he had never known and which was to destroy him. His first vision of Marian and her family comes from high up on the balcony of the house as he looks down on to the grass. In Norwich Cathedral, we see him dwarfed from the vaulted ceiling, and the plunging verticals give us some sense of the vertiginous

'The Go-Between': Margaret Leighton, Dominic Guard

nature of what is to befall him throughout the film. All through *The Go-Between*, the double staircase plays an essential role, and we are always looking down with Leo, or looking down on him. Even outside the house, when Leo is frantically running off on his errands, we see him, a tiny figure against the Norfolk countryside. Very flat, Norfolk, and it makes him look flatter, too. But Leo is no passive figure: like some tragic hero, he rushes headlong to embrace his fate.

These are only a few examples of how Losey and Pinter have not only transposed the novel into film terms, but also, in a sense, transformed it. More even than in his previous films, Losey here achieves an almost palpable sense of reality, which gives the moral force of the film a greater intensity because of the heightened contradiction between apparent surface and true subject. You can feel the clothes, you can smell the heat; and because all these sensual details are so physically realised, you end up hearing the unsaid, seeing the unseen. If only they could tackle Proust now. ■

Politics and Pontecorvo

David Wilson

'The natives' challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute.'—FRANTZ FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth.*

Algiers, 1957. The FLN has called an eight-day general strike in the Casbah to coincide with the United Nations debate on the Algerian question. The French paratroopers called in to crush the Algerian uprising use the opportunity of a paralysed Casbah to root out suspects and systematically break up the Front's hitherto impregnable pyramidal structure. The strike, and with it the morale of the masses, has been effectively broken when a French policeman harangues the Arab crowd through a Tannoy on the benefits of the French administration. Suddenly, unseen, an Arab boy steals the microphone and rallies the crowd: 'Courage! Algeria will be free!' Consternation among police and paras; the veiled women of the Casbah respond with an eerie high-pitched wail of assent.

Queimada, a Caribbean island, near the beginning of the last century. With British economic interests threatened by a native rebellion, the army is called in to flush out the rebels. A 'search and destroy' strategy, ruthlessly applied, eliminates all but a hard core of the insurgents. Searching the native villages for arms, a group of soldiers confront some women and a little boy. As the women are interrogated, the camera fastens on the boy's face.

Scenes from two films made by Gillo Pontecorvo, previously known only for the highflown kitsch of *Kapo*, in which Susan Strasberg was the Jewish girl who sold her soul in a concentration camp. Two scenes taken out of context, but isolated because they illustrate what I think is a central weakness in Pontecorvo's variety of political cinema. Unfair perhaps, but those close-ups of a little boy's face could be taken as the objective correlative of Pontecorvo's screen revolution: Third World dissent in the emotive terms of an Oxfam poster. *Battle of Algiers*, made in 1965, effectively banned in France, and only recently given a public airing in this country thanks to the enterprise of the Other Cinema, has garnered almost universal critical acclaim ('one of the greatest films ever made'; 'probably the finest political film ever made'). *Queimada!* (United Artists), made three years ago, looks like getting a somewhat less ecstatic, though still fairly enthusiastic, reception. Both films are about revolution in a colonial setting; both trace the history of a revolution to its ultimate triumph (Algeria) or its suppression (Queimada); and both raise the old question of how (whether?) a political film can be evaluated over and above its politics.

This is not perhaps, except in a literal sense, a valid distinction. But let's assume that it can be made. As a film, *Battle of Algiers* is indeed a remarkable piece of work. Pontecorvo has said that the main challenge he faced was 'that of coming as close as possible to the truth.' A condensed version of the truth maybe, but what we see is an astonishingly convincing reconstruction of the Algerian revolt which adroitly encompasses a wealth of close-up detail within its wide-angle view of a complex historical event. Pontecorvo's method is simulated documentary—dynamic cutting, dramatic juxtaposition, hand-held, mobile camera, over-exposure and shooting against the light to give the effect of on-the-spot reportage, a commentary briskly interpolating chronology, facts and figures, brief biographies. The images are marshalled with masterly economy and for maximum impact, ominous silences dramatically counterpointed by (often literally) explosive action, as when the paratroopers swoop down on the strike-becalmed Casbah.

The film has all the drive and urgency of *Z* without that film's glossy overlay; and a nerve-tingling percussive score (by Pontecorvo and Ennio Morricone) which drums up audience anticipation, invariably rewarded. There isn't a foot of newsreel in the film, but Pontecorvo's staging of headline events (filmed entirely in Algiers) has a newsreel authenticity. The murder of French policemen provokes a retaliatory spiral of violence which envelops the whole city; private houses and public buildings are blown up; tanks roll in the streets in warning answer to a spontaneous demonstration. The atmosphere is charged, but Pontecorvo can still find room for the human touch, like the first Arab wedding under the auspices of the FLN—or that little boy's face in close-up again as he bravely rejects the chance of life in a reformatory instead of death at the hands of French paratroopers about to dynamite the house in which he and Ali la Pointe, illiterate hero of the revolution, are trapped.

Pontecorvo is on the side of the angels (the film ends with a triumphant announcement of Algerian independence, which comes like a *deus ex machina* after the downbeat drama of that last explosion), but it is his sympathy for the devil that has won him the critical plaudits. *Battle of Algiers* is certainly propagandist, the argument goes, but as political cinema it's not crude like *Z* or caricatural like *Strike*, and what shines through is the impeccable honesty of Pontecorvo's objective stance. How Pontecorvo achieves this much praised objectivity can perhaps best be illustrated by his characterisation of Colonel Mathieu, the film's version of the paratroop leader General Massu. Mathieu enters Algiers like some faceless latter-day Caesar come to deliver the colonists from the troublesome natives; but dark glasses off, and he's human like the rest of us—parrying a journalist's untimely reference to Dien Bien Phu with an unanswerable gibe about the Sartres of the world always being on the wrong side, astonishing a press conference with a eulogy for the FLN leader who has just hanged himself in his cell, justifying his methods (torture) with an ends and means logic that Lenin might have approved. 'We are not sadists,' he tells a sensation-seeking press. 'Some of us survived Buchenwald. If you want Algeria to remain French you must accept the consequences'—and Pontecorvo illustrates with a montage of torture, intercut with a big close-up of an Algerian woman's tear-stained face.

The logic of this ostensibly commendable aspiration to play fair by both sides requires Pontecorvo to draw up a shaky balance sheet of emotive pros and cons. So the blowing up of a house in the Casbah is answered with FLN explosives in the French quarter, and *both* atrocities are accompanied on the soundtrack by the same bars of melancholy Bach; a pathetic old Arab street-cleaner is terrified out of his wits by hysterical cries of 'Assassin!', but it is a French policeman who rescues an Algerian boy set upon after an explosion at the racetrack. One might admit as a legitimate melodramatic device the way he has filmed the long pivotal sequence in which three Algerian women plant bombs in crowded public places: that old Hitchcockian clock ticking away, the anxious subjective pan around the faces of innocents about to be massacred, the lingering close-up of a child licking an ice-cream. One might even gloss over the historical simplifications, like the fantasy—necessary for the melodramatic peripeteia of the film's coda—that the paras wiped out the FLN in Algiers. But just what is Pontecorvo saying with all this objective display, other than that violence begets violence, that revolution also involves the innocent bystander, that oppression also has a human face? Is it possible to take an 'objective' view of history?

Of course not, and *Battle of Algiers* is in this sense a confidence trick. If, as a committed film-maker, Pontecorvo is for the Algerian revolution (as he is), and if his intention was to deliver that message to as wide an audience as he could reach (as presumably it was), then why equivocate? All that dramatic irony and moral ambival-

ence is only a romantic humanist's sugaring of the pill for a liberal audience unwilling to stomach the hard facts of revolution. 'Colonialism,' wrote Fanon, 'is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.' *Battle of Algiers* accepts this lesson of history, but fogs the issue by dangling a carrot to the liberal conscience. A neat and comfortably retrospective piece of historical theatre; but the truth is a lot less tidy.

This is the essential paradox of political cinema. The more 'objective' the stance taken by a political film and the more sophisticated its method (*L'Aveu* as against *Z*, for instance), the less its effectiveness in propaganda terms and the greater the risk of ambiguous overtones. Significantly, militant blacks in America have responded to *Battle of Algiers* less as a message for the Third World than as a training manual for urban guerrilla tactics. It could be argued that *Battle of Algiers*, by fixing its focus on the collective dissent of a people (it wasn't, but no matter) and generally avoiding the ramifications of personality, is no more than a modern version of Eisenstein's agit-guignol; to the contemporary eye, saturated with television newsreels of urban protest, those tanks on the street are beginning to seem almost as formalist an image as the bayonets on the Odessa steps. Paradoxically, *Queimada!*, which subordinates collective revolutionary gestures to a conflict of personalities, emerges as both a more vigorous and a less ambivalent demonstration of Pontecorvo's political dialectic.

The film's fictional framework acts as a distancing device. Briefly, the story centres on the Machiavellian intrigues of Sir William Walker, an *agent provocateur* sent by the British Admiralty to an island in the Antilles to break the Portuguese monopoly on Caribbean sugar. He achieves this by instigating a revolt of the African-descended slaves against their Portuguese masters, only to persuade the insurrectionist leader José Dolores, whom he has personally instructed in the methods of revolution, to stand down in favour of a puppet colonial government. Ten years later he returns to the island, now as agent for a British sugar company, to suppress a revolt led by the same José Dolores, who has learned enough from his political master to prefer martyrdom to the impotent freedom which Sir William Walker offers him.

No question that as a film *Queimada!* is not in the same class as *Battle of Algiers*: slow off the mark, unevenly paced, in places (the brief London scenes, for instance) uncomfortably reminiscent of one of those pseudonymous Cinecittà costume quickies. It does have some of the same epic sweep and dramatic urgency of the earlier film—in isolated moments, like the startling cut from a lesson in rifle-loading to a grim array of colonial corpses; and in whole sequences, like the firing of the plantations as the British redcoats flush out and methodically eliminate the last of the rebels. But there are also similarities of structure (the execution of a rebel, portentously situated in both films near the beginning; overneat punctuation marks, in *Queimada!* the facile dramatic irony of Walker's murder by the porter who carries his bags, a service performed ten years previously by José Dolores) which only illuminate Pontecorvo's reliance on melodramatic device.

'Battle of Algiers'; Evaristo Marquez, Marlon Brando in 'Queimada!'

It is another link between the films—the way in which the leading players are cast as mere puppets on the larger stage of history—which illustrates why *Queimada!* is better political cinema than *Battle of Algiers*. The focus is fixed throughout on Sir William Walker, not as a character—since he is hardly defined as one—but as the agent of Pontecorvo's demonstration of the process of history. Though Pontecorvo occasionally falls back on emotive emphasis (the widow of the executed rebel wheeling his decapitated body through her village, incantatory music when the rebels are on the march), he has no need here to strike an 'objective' balance since he is not dealing in points of view. Walker is the immediate instigator of the action, but in a curious way he is detached from the consequences of his own machinations; in effect, his function is didactic, an illustrative cipher for a determinist theory of history.

Interestingly, Pontecorvo has cast Marlon Brando in this role (which in itself amounts to a theatrical distancing device), and he plays it with the kind of clipped aloofness which indicates an awareness of the character's place in the film's scheme. 'I'm not quite sure what I'm doing here,' Walker says at one point. And when he asks his revolutionary protégé whether he knows the latest market quotation for raw sugar, it is not his voice speaking so much as the voice of history, here illustrating the inevitability of the economics of capitalism—the historical consequences of which is the real villain of the piece, rather than perfidious Albion or Walker himself. As Walker says, 'Ten years may be enough to illuminate the contradictions of a whole century.' The message is clear enough without his not so cryptic remark about Indochina being his next port of call. ■

Film REVIEWS

Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime

For Alain Resnais there is a place but not necessarily *a* time, for everything. There are often several times. A man's stored experience is like a high walled garden fretted with innumerable doors, and apertures of every shape set at different heights; some are easy of access, others require large efforts to reach and reward the owner of the garden sometimes with views which appear exactly the same as others, sometimes with a lying perspective, and occasionally with no more than the door or aperture itself. The owner may be pacing within the garden, speculating about turns in its paths and the state of the plants, too engrossed to notice that he has passed his own corpse lying at his feet. *Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime* (Fox) shows us Resnais' preoccupation with the charms and terrors of time at its most exciting, confident and beguiling.

Claude Ridder, a young man just released from hospital in Brussels after a suicide attempt, is waylaid by a couple of quietly dressed men who ask him if he will accompany them to Crespel, a clinic in the countryside where they would be grateful to him if he will co-operate in an experiment. He complies almost as if he had expected such an invitation; and as the party drives through the suburbs and into the country, accompanied on the soundtrack by an elegiac electronic wail, Ridder asks if his stewards will do something extraordinary—like turning the Mercedes in which they are driving into a pumpkin.

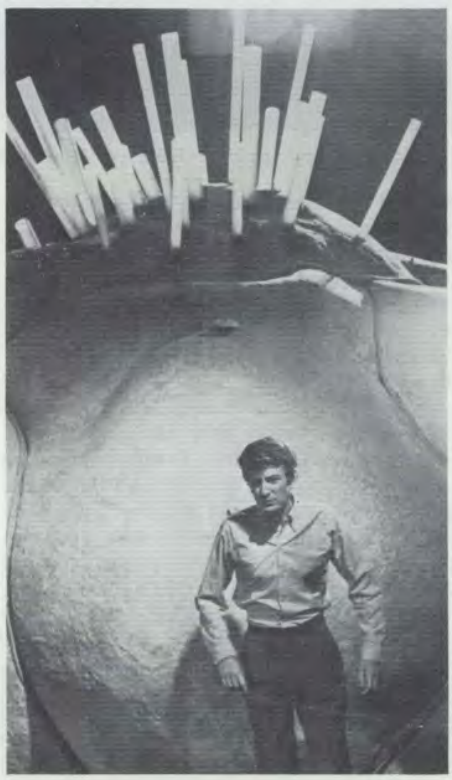
The themes and style of *Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime* are established early. The discreet and serious scientists who walk the lawns at Crespel explain to Ridder that they are working on time and their investigations are as yet at an early, even a primitive stage. He is shown a mouse, a pioneer who has travelled back one year in time; it is for just this journey that Ridder will be the first human guinea pig. He is laconic and yet alert to the care with which he has been selected: he is a man with no useful future. Yes, the scientists agree there might be some danger in the experiment, but, they insist, they are not after anything spectacular. He will only be on a short trip, he will be drugged, he will return in four minutes. 'It may seem uninteresting,' they say apologetically.

These sober, chronologically designed opening scenes in which Ridder is briefed, tested and drugged establish an atmosphere of seemingly impeccable scientific investigation. It is only when Ridder is shown into the chamber which contains the time machine, and exclaims that he had expected a laboratory, that elements of menace and fancy lurch into view. Connected by naked cables to a number of serviceable but unsophisticated data-reading desks is a gigantic pumpkin, crowned with a stubble of pipes like drinking straws.

The rest of the film describes Ridder's adventures inside this soft machine. In a series of brief, perfectly timed and seemingly arbitrary scenes we witness the hesitant and painful gropings in time for the moment one year ago which the scientists have appointed as Ridder's time-goal. He is swimming, masked head under water, in the Mediterranean. He is floating between the elements of air and water, just as he is between the present in his time-machine and the multiple pasts which constellate round the banal moment he has been asked to regain in his past. The audience is made aware of the precarious and makeshift quality of the experiment by observing the struggles of Ridder to be obedient to the dictates of the drug, the machine and the watching scientists. It becomes clear as he blinks and stares at his past progress that Ridder is a more formidable man than we may have guessed—we see him speculate wittily upon philosophical questions with his girl friends, we see him at one moment as a younger man refusing to take promotion in the printing firm where he works, at another as a well dressed executive interviewing Catrine, the girl he falls in love with, charmed by her own indifference to getting a job. Every image, including those which we may take to be dreams, becomes a metaphor of struggle; a struggle against passivity, against embracing death.

'I love confusion, disorder . . .' Ridder announces provocatively at one moment. Only in the ironic contemplation of disorder can he enjoy a sense of life. It is a signal success of Resnais' film and Claude Rich's performance that Ridder is a richly individual and charming character. He is aware of the absurdity both of his past life, with its hesitant speculations, and of his present condition, accompanied only by a caged mouse in a comic simulacrum of the human brain. Whether or not he murdered Catrine in a Glasgow boarding house, how he tried to kill himself and why he failed, are shown to be little more than pedantic obsessions in face of the chaotic comedy of his consciousness. The 'blocks' to the moment assigned to him by the scientists are a densely woven, arbitrary pattern of desires, dreams, dream-tellings and useless seconds. He is by a tram stop repeatedly; he goes out of the Glasgow room again and again, meeting, or on the edge of meeting, someone different each time. He tells a man in a train about seducing a girl in a bathroom, and later we see this scene; clearly it is a fantasy. His brain is a teasing and cumbersome contraption; it is subject to every form of evasion and inefficiency, like the whole scientific operation in which he is involved.

'Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime': the soft machine



Where *Marienbad* and *Muriel* were meditations, *Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime* is an investigation. In the earlier films the incongruities of memory were bathed in poetry; the new film wins its marvellous effects of realism by its editing. There is not a mix or a dissolve in the whole picture and only rarely does the camera move within a shot. The filming of the experiment is broken into sharp, separated instances, few of them lasting two minutes, many of them less than five seconds. The result is that after the leisurely opening scenes there are no sequences in the customary cinematic sense of the word—and none of them reflect the style we associate with Resnais in the past, his camera prowling and staring, in constant movement, at creatures immersed in time. Instead, from the first moment that Ridder disappears from his bed in the time machine to the final frozen frame of his mouse companion coming up for air, we follow the cataract of consciousness in what seems like a single, infinitely fragmented moment of urgency. When Ridder finally regains a moment in his past it is not the one assigned to him, but the most significant of all, his own attempted suicide with a revolver. Immediately following are three shots of his dying body lying in various parts of the grounds at Crespel. He has been projected into death.

JULIAN JEBB

The Rite

At the beginning of *The Rite* (Darvill), the examining magistrate stares intensely through a magnifying glass at us, the audience; his authority is painstaking, dignified, unquestionable, and we are made uneasy by its scrutiny. But with the next shot we are switched to the magistrate's viewpoint and we study with him the trio of strolling players who are to be interrogated, their photographs cheerfully beguiling, their costumes clownish, their name (a label the more equivocal for having been accepted by themselves), 'Les Riens'. The impartiality with which Bergman encourages us to take both sides of his arguments has seldom been more clearly demonstrated; we are to be both prosecution and defence in a process of distinctly theological self-analysis. For this is Sunday and confession is in the air: God and Man, the inseparable and often indistinguishable antagonists, are once again locked in battle.

The alleged offence for which 'Les Riens' are being questioned is the possible obscenity of one of the scenes in their show; but before examining this incident Bergman and the magistrate have some preliminary revelations in mind. The nervous bravado of the players is swept aside in no time. As a group, they have evaded taxes, committed such lesser offences as speeding and obstructing the police, and are accustomed to habitual perjury; singly, their catalogue of transgressions is impressive—whether uncovered during their separate interviews with the magistrate (who appears, with professional omniscience, to know the answers before he asks the questions) or during their private duologues (they are only seen as a trio in the magistrate's office). Albert Emanuel Sebastian Fisher (Anders Ek), who has lost count of his illegitimate children, is a bankrupt and a

'Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime': Claude Rich and Carla Marlier

murderer. Winkelmann (Gunnar Björnstrand), spokesman for the group, has a broken marriage behind him, a congenital idiot child he never visits, and is prepared to bribe his way out of any difficult situation. Thea von Ritt-Winkelmann (Ingrid Thulin), his present wife, is hyper-sensitive, subject to epileptic fits, and a nymphomaniac. Although she's the focal point of interest, both for her two partners and for the magistrate, Thea is an elusive compilation of deceits—uncertain in hair-colour, age, name, health and allegiances.

The doubts and agonies that assail 'Les Riens', whose capacity for self-punishment is what keeps them human for Bergman and for us, are matched by those of the magistrate himself. Abramsson (Erik Hell) may be required to personify the disinterest of the law, but like the pathetic façades of the actors, this is a mask that keeps slipping. When he keeps his visitors waiting it is not to complete the examination of their dossier but to wipe the sweat from his hands: his sense of personal inadequacy competes with the dignity of his office in a perpetually intolerable conflict.

Like the actors, Abramsson is ingratiatingly eager to expose himself; at the first encounter he is telling them about the loneliness of his life and the warnings of his doctor, and at the last he babbles excuses for having had to trouble them at all: 'My father wanted me to be a lawyer, but I have no talent for it. . . . I'm only doing my duty, forgive me.' Obsessed with the sense of approaching death, he visits a confessional in his turn and prays for insight, although without much hope; beginning and ending with the shot of an expressionless stone face, it's a scene which reinforces the film's opening mood of dual identification, for Abramsson addresses his confession directly to camera and the reverse-shot reveals the features of his audience to be those of Bergman himself, watching, listening, and sharing. So that we need be in no doubt by the end of *The Rite* that the character of the judge is no more pristine than those of 'Les Riens', his vices are seen to match theirs in direct parallel—he is as violent as Fisher, as unscrupulous and solitary as Winkelmann, as lustfully precipitate as Thea. He is as they are in all but one vital respect, but it is this single difference that is the heart of Bergman's tale.

As with *Hour of the Wolf* before it and *A Passion* immediately afterwards, Bergman apparently seeks to 'defuse' the contest in *The Rite* by presenting it as a case history; he divides it into nine question-and-answer sessions and adds a concluding statement as if it were no more than evidence being submitted for a yet higher authority. Each session is formally heralded by a scene-setting announcement and concluded by a number of dissonant chords on an untuned piano, devices which stress the artificiality of the *Kammerspiel* method of confining drama to a small group of players in uncluttered surroundings. The result, however, far from being to dislocate the film's logical development, is to render its themes more accessible, and to confirm in the most direct manner possible that the ritual of dramatic presentation has a transcendent charge too powerful for analysis.

Their surroundings pruned of detail, their supposed deeds compounded of betrayal, violence and fallibility, Bergman's actors nevertheless achieve the instant enlistment of the audience in accepting their masquerade. What matters in the film is not so much the final enactment of the controversial performance itself—a rather tame bit of posturing which deliberately leaves us immune from the spell it casts over the magistrate—but the fascination of what has led up to it. The artist has demonstrated his power for us long before he is required to do so for his interrogator in the film; if any justification were needed for the continuation of 'Les Riens', it lies in the hallucinatory nature of their off-stage confrontations, their mesmeric ability to set their fictional world beside our real one and persuade us that both are the same (even to the extent that we share their wilder fantasies, like Fisher's apparent attempt to burn himself to death). Although we have no need of the heavier symbolism—the devil/bird masks, the monstrous phalluses, the drinking of blood—and are not expected to share the judge's physical heart-failure, our response to the subtler manifestations of all of these earlier in the film marks us as gullible subscribers to the artist's worth from the moment we paid for our seats.

Such persuasion is hardly new to Bergman, who was making out the same case eleven years earlier with the remarkably similar events of *The Face*. With its lesser preoccupations, too, *The Rite* is familiar territory: sexual and social humiliation, marital instability (with a tiny *Sawdust and Tinsel* reference at the key moment), the search for God and identification with the sufferings of Christ, physical and mental decay, and the need to hide beneath a veneer of greasepaint and costume (of which Thea's indeterminate age and Fisher's impenetrable dark glasses are subtler examples).

These insistent echoes resound more stridently in *The Rite* than elsewhere in Bergman's recent films mainly, one suspects, because the film was made for a smaller screen (it was shown by Swedish television in March 1969). Although close-ups are integral to Bergman's Strindbergian approach, their frequency in *The Rite* gives it an oppressive quality that on the cinema screen comes near to exaggeration. By comparison with the elliptical complexities of *A Passion*, or the more worldly nightmares of *The Shame*, the attack in *The Rite* is an aggressively head-on affair, Gothic in spirit if not in display. On the other hand, it demonstrates the survival of the artist with a more positive affirmation than Bergman has represented through the shambling outcasts in his past ten years' work. The magician, perhaps, is due for a renewal of confidence.

PHILIP STRICK

'The Rite'

Murray Head, Glenda Jackson in 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday'

Sunday, Bloody Sunday

John Schlesinger is not a director whom one readily associates with tenderness. Where that emotion has existed in his previous films—Bathsheba's eventual reconciliation to the patient devotion of Gabriel Oak in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, for example—it has tended to be dwarfed by louder and less disciplined elements (in that case, nature, with disaster lurking behind every thunder cloud and giant gorse bush). Rather more frequently, the bravura presentation of these elements (the fantasticated imaginings of the hero in *Billy Liar*, the brittle immorality of the heroine in *Darling*, the neon dazzle of New York in *Midnight Cowboy*) has effectively precluded the emergence of tender feelings, whether in the stridently delineated characters or in the audience on their behalf. But in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (United Artists), Schlesinger has at last discovered the virtues of understatement and the wisdom of making no statements at all. Although its minimal story abounds in temptations to trendiness (a bisexual triangle, a kinetic artist, a terrifying family of left-wing intellectuals), Schlesinger has maintained this material as a social parenthesis to the rawly exposed but tightly controlled emotions of his central characters. And the result is a beautifully disciplined work, affectionately laughing at its characters' pretensions and shot through with a rare and unsentimental compassion.

The apex of the triangle is Bob, an egotistical young artist in his early twenties (played by Murray Head with just the right mixture of superficial charm and spontaneous solicitude), passionately involved with his work and the fame he feels sure of finding on the other side of the Atlantic. He enjoys the doubtful blessing of receiving rather more emotion than he is capable of giving from the two people he professes to love—Daniel Hirsh, a middle-aged Jewish doctor, and Alex Greville, a discontented divorcée trying to find out what she's good at doing—and commutes from one to the other whenever a problem or a demand rises too close to the surface. Although the film never articulates this, his tough self-sufficiency very obviously derives from a youthful faith in his own future, just as the anxieties of both his lovers spring directly from their greater experience of life—the fact that both their faith and their futures have to some extent already been used up. Six years ago, Bob might have provided the hero for a male *Darling*; but here his function is essentially catalytic, and he is not presented as being in himself of any great interest. Instead, Schlesinger focuses attention on two characters more used to analysing their emotions and less used to indulging them. Their dramas never explode, since they reside precisely in the knowledge that they must never articulate the full extent of what they feel. And in very different registers (he, sad-eyed and stoical; she, tense and apologetic) both Peter Finch and Glenda Jackson achieve a convincing and vulnerable tension between what they permit themselves to say and what they involuntarily reveal, what they irrationally want of their love, and what they know to be possible.

It is characteristic of the new Schlesinger that they never do break down and ask for it, that the crisis which threatens their separate relationships with Bob never erupts but is painfully sidestepped by his eventual decision to visit New York. The tension accumulates, is checked, but is never relieved by dramatic or melodramatic confrontation. Time and again, the *scène-à-faire* is set up but never actually made. When Daniel learns of Bob's imminent departure by discovering the vaccination mark on his arm, his only audible concern is that Bob should have gone to another doctor; when Bob finds Alex (a personnel officer) in an obvious state of post-coital fluster with the elderly client whom she has both pitied and identified with, he makes no allusion to the incident before bedding down with her for the night. The tolerance that she painfully imposes on herself for his affair with Daniel is quite spontaneous with him; and instead of a welcome display of jealousy, she finds only another reminder of the generation—and experience—gap which separates them.

It is also an indication of the film's maturity, and of Penelope Gilliatt's finely tuned screenplay, that though primarily concerned with exploring its characters' feelings, it respects their adulthood enough to recognise the professional and social commitments, generally more irksome than agreeable, that will prevent the loss of their lover affecting them like either Tristan or Isolde. When Bob storms out of a truly dreadful soirée at Daniel's house, where a jealous wife is trying to get back at her husband by stripping off for the other guests, one is made to feel more conscious of his callowness than of his discrimination. Even the self-consciously liberal family, friends of both Alex and Daniel, with their mother's milk in the refrigerator, their dog called Kenyatta, their communal bathing and their token African permanently in residence, are presented without malice—an awkward fact of life in a world where only the unfeeling young never make fools of themselves.

Even the script's main flaw, a tendency to schematism—with the meticulously tidy bachelor listening to classical music in his Georgian house, while the untidy divorcée scatters cigarette ash over her disordered studio—is redeemed by its constant virtue of never spelling anything out. While in keeping with the theme of dawning middle-age and quiet desperation, photographer Billy Williams mutes his colours to achieve a mellow, autumnal mood. At one point in the film, Daniel takes a prescription to the all-night chemist's in Piccadilly, and the inevitable line of heroin-addicts moves no less inevitably into frame. It's a measure of the film's success that instead of the touristic/voyeuristic feeling induced by similar scenes in *Midnight Cowboy*, one is left sharing the doctor's not quite useless compassion for the sadness of the world.

JAN DAWSON

I Walk the Line

John Frankenheimer's own evaluation of his work sees a fairly straightforward development from his early assignments as a 'hired' director to the present, when he is able to initiate and control projects of his own choosing. The most obvious paradox of this progression is that a once readily identifiable, pyrotechnical style is steadily becoming more self-effacing, static and muted. *I Walk the Line* (Columbia) takes the process a stage further—a story of a desperate scramble after love out of middle-aged boredom and despair, contemplated rather than explored, observed with a detachment that permits few dramatic highlights and even swallows the expected shocks of domestic crisis in an air of brooding hopelessness.

The basis for the film, Madison Jones' novel *An Exile*, seems potentially a more interesting and complete Frankenheimer project than *I Walk the Line* comes close to achieving. It shares common ground with other recent subjects—*The Fixer*, *The Gypsy Moths*—in which the director evidently found much personal satisfaction. The problems of freedom, of an individual's responsibility for the decisions, or lack of decision, that bring self-fulfilment or self-destruction, here involve the sheriff of a small rural town in the South who becomes infatuated with a local bootlegger's daughter (Tuesday Weld) and courts her in a bewildered attempt to escape the futility of his life. She sees the relationship as a way of protecting her family, while he gradually suffers the loss of professional self-respect, the destruction of his family, implication in the murder of one of his deputies, and finally, when the bootlegger's still is raided by federal agents, the girl's contempt. But the deeper themes here are treated so externally, are built so carefully into a piece that dwells meditatively on mood rather than emotion, that they tend to remain buried in the material.

The difficulty is exemplified in the casting of Gregory Peck. As the sheriff of Madison Jones' novel, Peck is potentially a shrewd choice. But he is hardly allowed to reproduce the man's aura of honesty and resolution—the actor's familiar persona—nor given much help by the script in defining the distraction that suddenly prompts the sheriff to see these qualities as empty. Instead he is called on to play the role with an unaccustomed range of surface expression and gesture that results in a frequent sense of strain.

One's unease about the film's lack of development can be related to past misgivings about Frankenheimer's relation to his collaborators.

Dalton Trumbo's screenplay for *The Fixer* worked with a formal, almost scholarly precision on classical ideas about freedom and the individual which Frankenheimer framed respectfully and a little over-solemnly. *The Gypsy Moths*, which forms the better half of a natural pair with *I Walk the Line*, had characters whose existential terrors were lucidly established and whom Frankenheimer could pointedly relate to one another, to their setting and to the film's action. But Alvin Sargent's screenplay for *I Walk the Line* provides only brief indications of what is going on beneath the surface, indications that are meditated over, rather than extended, through some of Frankenheimer's customary compositions (characters in large close-up at one side of the screen, reigning in brooding indifference or oppressive malice over what is happening in the rest of the frame), or through the camera that prowls after the hapless sheriff and his wife as if to capture the significant moment of conflict, or the illuminating gesture that never quite occurs.

By contrast, Johnny Cash's music makes a more explicit attempt to define what is going on within these people. From the ironic lines of the title song, accompanied at the beginning and end of the film by brief glimpses of life quietly rusting in the countryside, through to statements about the economic misfortunes that belie simple, legal distinctions of right and wrong, and an explanation of Sheriff Tawes' obsession ('Flesh and blood needs flesh and blood'), the songs at times seem on the point of turning the film into mere illustration of their ballads of life, love and death.

But one interesting by-product of this visual reserve is that it accommodates moods and references from styles apparently quite outside Frankenheimer's own. In their obvious alienation, the characters seem like Antonioni creatures transferred to the agrarian South. The film opens with a shot of Tawes standing by the dam that has submerged his family home, the countryside now carefully cultivated and ruled by hydro-electric installations; small town life is sketchily suggested by an accretion of bizarre, death-in-life details—the old people on their porches, a shopkeeper's conversation on the sick and the dead and those who '. . . will be, by next Tuesday.' But the penetration of the film as a whole is curiously limited; a short trip on small resources and with rewards correspondingly meagre.

RICHARD COMBS

Ice

Ice (The Other Cinema) shows a number of young guerrillas planning and initiating active insurrection in New York in the winter of sometime in the near future. The U.S. Government is engaged in a war of aggression in Mexico and at home is proving ferocious in its suppression of personal liberties. What happens in the film has not happened in life yet: neither the scale of the insurrection nor the planned horror of the suppression. But nothing about America encourages the belief that it won't happen soon. A recent *New York Review of Books* quoted two typical reports from a daily newspaper: F.B.I. agents are being instructed to infiltrate radical groups simply to increase the paranoia of their members; of a selection of students interviewed at Kent State, a quarter revealed that their own parents believed that the students murdered by the National Guard only got what they deserved.

If the society you live in is breaking apart in this horrific way, what sort of films do you make? It could be objected that Robert Kramer's film is slow, overlong, badly structured, amateurishly acted, uninterestingly shot, and that it has a disastrous soundtrack. On the other hand these seem impertinent complaints when you learn, for instance, that members of the young cast are already dead. And yet the film is in the form of an imaginative fiction, with characters, dialogue, development, climax and so on—qualities we associate with art rather than life. Films like this deliberately beg the question by portraying a situation in art which primarily demands, it seems, a response in life.

It depends on what function the work performs. If it isn't 'a work of art', is it an encouragement to potential revolutionaries, a report to colleagues in the field, or an uncommitted survey of the way things are going? Comparisons with Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (the previous presentation by The Other Cinema) are interesting. There seems to me no doubt, for what it's worth, that the Pontecorvo is immeasurably superior artistically. It's brilliantly staged, authentically reconstructed, lucidly argued, finely balanced—and technically superb. It also appears unquestionably more clever: that is to say, in an area where a great many distinctions and correspondences have to be made and drawn it makes and draws many more than *Ice*, where the thinking is pretty low-geared. Does any of this matter in the way that it would in other contexts? After all, aren't both films unmistakably about the inevitability of left-wing revolution and don't they both conclude that, despite some milk having to be spilt, that'll be a good thing?

Before trying to answer that perhaps we should look at what happens in *Ice* in more detail. Several groups, regional and local, mostly of young people, discuss the problems of violent rebellion. There is no question about who the enemy is, although we hardly see them. The main problem, apart from security, is persuasion —making allies of the silent majority. But security is a problem never overcome. One of the group is attacked and castrated (?) by the secret police. By the end several of the group are dead, but not before they have made a more or less successful occupation of a large housing complex and lectured the inhabitants (at machine-gun point) about freedom. Subsidiary episodes deal with a bizarre and manic bookshop owner who acts, increasingly reluctantly, as an information centre for the group; or a girl who betrays a former boy friend by being carelessly uninvolved; or the attempt of an industrial cybernetics firm to buy itself into revolution when it sees that its lucrative government contract might soon be forcibly wound up.

In the manner popularised by Godard the screen occasionally fills with slogans, such as: 'We must negate the present in all its forms and build the future,' and 'Humanity won't be happy until the last bureaucrat is dissolved in the blood of the last capitalist.' Though it is a kind of defence for a film-maker to say that bad propaganda is just good propaganda you don't agree with, yet it is still possible to find something unsatisfactory about these sentiments and their equivocal place in *Ice*. If they are Kramer's own, they shake our confidence in his rational powers. If they aren't then he makes a mistake in not examining them. The fact that the film is rather cold and utterly innocent of humour is further evidence that might drive us to associate these substitutes for thought with the film-maker himself.

It may not be fair, but perhaps we could look elsewhere for a hint of Kramer's own views. He has written of seeing us all moving to a 'higher level of struggle—within ourselves, with our sisters and brothers and, above all, with the State, and all those national and international forces that limit the free extension of human possibility. The concrete, material realisation of freedom—of what was once 'Utopian' freedom—that is our historical task. Freedom from all wants, all false needs, freedom for all new collective developments and potentialities.'

Quite a programme. Unfortunately it looks like the product of thinking at the same level as the film's slogans. It enjoys the same dangerous totalitarian generalisations, the same naive ignorance of evidence, the same self-deluding definitions of freedom, that revolutionary cry which has ushered in reigns of terror right, left, and centre throughout history. What we ask of honourable propaganda is, after all, the same as what we ask of a work of art: that it extend our understanding—not our opinions—by specifying, rather than curtail it by generalising. If Kramer were to demand that we do him the honour of judging his film as propaganda rather than as art, then we should have to object either to its dishonesty or its naiveté. It is not specific enough to define freedom for all in terms of another round of new murders, new kidnappings, new fears and hatreds. To swallow that kind of paradox—not an unfamiliar one nor, necessarily, unswallowable—we need more evidence of hard thought, of scepticism, of perspective, than this long wrangle of honest, boring verbiage and

Tuesday Weld, Gregory Peck in 'I Walk the Line'

Urban guerrilla in 'Ice'

self-deluding violence offers. Nothing in the film convinces us that these radicals have any firmer grasp of what freedom might mean than the disgusting regime they are resisting. Well, that only puts them in the same boat as the rest of us. What's worrying is that Kramer seems not to doubt that they have, and that they are right, in aim and method. And if for no other reason, then for Pontecorvo's hard-edged doubt, his awareness of the monstrous complexity of the problem, we must continue to prefer such films as *The Battle of Algiers*, both as good art and good propaganda for what *Ice* too easily defines as 'freedom'.

GAVIN MILLAR

Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion

Kafka's characters are always willing to explain their inhumanities in the light of an all-vindicating social machinery, whose purpose and omniscience they take on trust. 'Proof' is an irrelevance for them. As his text for *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (Columbia), Elio Petri has taken a sentence from Kafka's *The Trial*: 'Whatever impression he may give us, he is a servant of the Law, and therefore he belongs to the Law and is beyond human judgment.' Though the proposition contains a cautionary truth for our society, Petri's attempt to prove it with 'real' characters in a 'real' context outside the crucible of Kafka's own metaphysic not only seems naively literal-minded, but neglects to see that Kafka's truths are the more frightening because they are impervious to proof or denial. The value of each truth is substantiated merely by the stability of the system.

'Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion': Gian Maria Volonte

The result of Petri's self-imposed demonstrational exercise is that character and story are in fact schematised out of any recognisable 'reality'. The film's weird stylistic hybrid of police thriller, anti-Fascist tract and study of degeneracy is less distracting than its conflicting levels of vision. Granted that the thesis requires an impossibly multi-faceted central figure—paranoiac, sensualist, intellectual, bully, pedant, fantasist—Petri is uncertain whether to build this character from inside or outside. The result is a destructive blend of the two, wavering between the subjectivity of scenes like the opening murder by the Inspector of his mistress (eccentric camera angles, eye-deceiving art nouveau decor) or his dream near the end, and the detached, alienating picture of his dealings with police colleagues. Here, indeed, Gian Maria Volonte's characterisation, its tyrannical sarcasm projected in full close-up, slides into caricature, climaxing in the promotion speech to his stupefied subordinates, a parade of Fascist epigrams ('Repression is civilisation') and facial contortions irresistibly recalling Peter Falk's police chief in *The Balcony*.

The only convincing unity to emerge through the gathering confusion is Petri's fascination with police procedure as a sophisticated mental game; or as the Inspector himself describes it to Augusta, 'a drama staged to touch off one's deepest, most secret feelings.' The Inspector's ambivalent attitude to his work—righteousness conflicting with guilt—recalls that of the Mastroianni character in Petri's *L'Assassino*, a murder enquiry also hinging on false assumptions and filmed, like *Investigation*, in a kind of perpetual physical motion of characters and camera. In the new film mobility occurs not only in inanimate images—the circular shape carried over from the stairway of Augusta's tenement to the spiral decoration on a house-front in the ensuing shot—but in the staging of Volonte's scenes in the police station, perpetually stamping up and down corridors or prowling round a cell during interrogation. Ennio Morricone's music, with its repetitive theme and *Psycho*-like thumping chords (one of several motifs, including the receding stairway vista and the blood draining in a vortex from the shower floor, that invoke Hitchcock) contributes to the same driving mobility, making us identify with the momentum with which Volonte scatters his clues, sets his traps and in final desperation resorts to open confession.

In depicting how the terminology and rituals of police procedure colour every department of his life—Augusta, we are told in flashback, became his mistress through infatuation with his power, and has herself photographed by him in the postures of assorted murder victims—*Investigation* works more potently as a study in obsession than as either anti-Fascist polemic or police thriller. As a thriller it suffers from providing all the salient information in the first scene, and from the necessary dim-wittedness of the Inspector's subordinates ('The only guilty man in the room is me,' he says heavily at one point, but to a dependably blank response). And it is surely too bizarre a case-history to have much weight as polemic. If power can shield degeneracy, it is not the rarer variety of Nietzschean fanatic that needs to be spotlighted so much as those inconspicuous servants of the state with day-to-day opportunities for the selfish abuse of authority.

NIGEL ANDREWS

Black Flowers for the Bride

Charm is an elusive quality at the best of times, almost as difficult to pin down as this wayward little black comedy, born under the twin stars of fairytale and vampire lore and effacing itself shyly behind a whole series of title changes (from *The Cook* and *The Rook* to *Something for Everyone*) before settling, for worse rather than better, on the unequivocal jocularity of *Black Flowers for the Bride* (Fox). It has, unquestionably, its faults, some looming large like the back-projections occasioned by poverty row, others merely stripping away a layer of its muted delicacy, like the alarmingly variable colour print. But it also has a tang, a *je ne sais quoi* of secret delight which sets one thinking of the nicer things in cinema: of *Love Me Tonight* and Lubitsch, perhaps, or of *Lord Love a Duck* and Little Mary.

Little Mary? How did she get into this catalogue of bitter-sweet Ruritanian romance with its Axelrodian appendix lamenting the impossibility of dreams in this modern world? Perhaps because the key to the film is an innocent, sentimental heart behind which one glimpses a tough, wide-eyed grasp on reality. Dreams proliferate in this film which may itself be a dream. Not large, ambitious dreams, mostly small, private yearnings, like the butler's room become a fantastic Nazi shrine to the memory of his dead father, or the Countess's vision of herself as a *grande dame* preserved in amber and suddenly spreading her gorgeous wings again. Yet all are shattered in turn by the ruthless arch-dreamer Conrad, the charming and handsome young man who cheerfully murders his way to the heart of Castle Ornstein. And it is no accident, of course, that in the end the biter himself is bit, his dream proving the harshest nightmare of all.

In the prologue, Conrad (Michael York) is cycling on a summer's day through an Austrian-Ruritanian kingdom when he pauses to wonder at Castle Ornstein, soaring magically into the sky from a nearby hilltop. An old priest breathlessly hurries by, and Conrad amiably helps him to wipe out thirty years of vain pursuit by catching the rarest butterfly in the land. First dream fulfilled. Not for nothing, as the film proper begins, is Conrad turning over the leaves of a children's fairytale starting with the immortal 'Once Upon a Time . . .' But before him the dying butterfly flutters helplessly in the alcohol bottle; and behind him, Castle Ornstein—Dracula's lair by any other name—hovers benignly, exercising its fatal fascination.

At first, as Conrad soothes his victims with his charm before despatching them—the footman who gives him a foothold in the castle by leaving a vacancy when he falls under a train; the *nouveau riche* heiress he beds and then weds to the son of the castle in order to bring money flowing back into its veins before he claims it—he seems to be the Dracula of the piece, outcast from his natural lair and coldly plotting to reclaim it. One might have known, though, that Dracula has no dreams, only fulfilment; one might have known, too, that Dracula fears no ordinary enemy, and Conrad fears the butler (who is protected by the enforced inadmissibility of his dream, the Nazi shrine). One does know, finally, when the Countess, watching her mousy, St. Trinians-ish daughter lacquering her nails, shudders with distaste: 'Really, darling, those look like the claws of some ancient vampire bat.'

Conrad, who successively mesmerises the footman in search of a friend, the heiress in search of romance, the effete son in search of a lover, and the Countess herself in remembrance of things past, is finally defeated by the one person who has no dream and therefore no loophole in her armour. Fat, plain and bespectacled, cheerfully brushing aside Conrad's lack of interest ('Ah me, another disastrous social failure') after approaching him, glass of milk in one hand and slice of chocolate cake in the other, for what only she could possibly interpret

as a pass, she is inviolable. She waits, she watches, and after compiling a dossier on Conrad's activities, succeeds in blackmailing him to the altar. Thereafter, one may be sure, she will keep him strictly for herself, delighted by his discomfiture and by that of her only surviving rivals—her mother the Countess and her brother the homosexual.

One talks about the film in this way at the risk of making it sound either ponderous or schematic when it is neither. But it does help to explain the extraordinary, casual cohesion which somehow manages to unite black jokes, comedy of manners (the marvellous garden party in which the Countess's old friends dust off their glittering chit-chat), amiable parody (the *White Horse Inn* yodelling peasants), and pure fun (the splendid cutting of the opera house sequence which brings an obese Tristan and Isolde together for a monumental collision) into a film of quiet, elusive charm. Because the characters, over and above what they are or seem to be, all retain their privacy, revealed only when they drop the mask to pursue their dreams, they have an unexpected, tangential quality. They *live*, in other words, reaping sympathy where they shouldn't (the butler) or where they should but normally wouldn't (the horsy companion), and giving the film a reality which belies its air of Ruritanian fantasy and its dream framework.

Harold Prince, in his first film after a distinguished Broadway career as producer and impresario, is the best thing that has happened to Hollywood since Francis Ford Coppola. He also deserves long, loud hallelujahs for giving Angela Lansbury her best role since *The Manchurian Candidate*. Whether bitching, lusting, or recalling with quiet, touching simplicity the good old days of her marriage, she is, quite simply, marvellous: a regally purring, world-wearily aristocratic alley-cat, Archy's Mehitabel to the life (*toujours gai toujours gai always the lady*).

TOM MILNE

Summer of '42

A number of reputations have attached themselves to Robert Mulligan's career, inevitably perhaps because the local character of his subjects, and exact attention to close detail, makes it easy to characterise the films by their feeling for particular environments. So Mulligan has been identified in turn by his treatment of the bewilderment and frustrations of urban existence, of the more nostalgic and tolerated sadnesses of small town life, and of the complex private worlds of childhood.

His latest film looks certain to boost the image of an accomplished director of children. But basic to all his work is its sense of the limitations, the fragility, of secluded worlds just waiting to be shattered. The boundaries and conditions of the world of *Summer of '42* (Warner) are first established, formally and rather conventionally, in Herman Raucher's original screenplay, which not only removes the action three decades into the past to an unnamed island—a holiday resort off the New England coast—but further distances it by having the main character, grown from stumbling adolescence to a reflective, reminiscing stage of life, attempt a summation of the past through a brief opening and closing narration. The tone of these pieces, reaching for a description of an illuminating 'beautiful experience'—Hermie's loss of virginity to an older woman—Mulligan maintains in spirit while quietly modifying their overly formal, sentimental conclusion ('. . . and, in a very special way, I lost Hermie forever') through a miniaturist's attention to the finer shades of mood.

Between these quotation marks, the film lays out in witty, schoolboy-scurrilous detail the plight of three adolescents, all too eager to breach the private world of their innocence and with it the fretful calm of their playground: 'I wish,' says one of them at a particularly low point of the summer's activities, 'that someone would invade this island.' Which is a fairly black joke for the summer of 1942. All the boys are shrewdly established and vividly enacted. While Hermie (Gary Grimes) in a way is being 'saved' for his relationship with Dorothy (Jennifer O'Neill), the woman in the beach house he is fond of ogling from afar, Oscy (Jerry Houser) is the centre of activity in the script, a non-stop monologuist on the tactical problems of making physical contact with girls. Fired with a practical inspiration that sets him copying out more authoritative strategy from a medical textbook, he is an original figure on the screen, its recent history notwithstanding, though familiar enough elsewhere, his activities, as noted by Nabokov '. . . described so sympathetically, with all the smells, in modern American novels.'

But the humour of their quest and obsessions Mulligan captures most closely in almost wordless sequences, such as the trip to the cinema where Hermie and Oscy attempt to grope their hasty pick-ups while Davis and Henreid light up the screen in *Now, Voyager*—a scene which manages to be a very funny set-piece, a confected piece of historical sociology and something of a camp joke. Again, for the crucial scene where Dorothy finally takes Hermie to bed with her, dialogue is totally displaced by an emphasis on the moods of light and movement—the slow, numbed motions of their dancing, shifting patterns of shadow on the wall, the ghostly illumination of objects by the early daylight—to suggest, against the tone of moral finality in the last line of the narration, the essential inconclusiveness of the experience.

RICHARD COMBS

Angela Lansbury and family in 'Black Flowers for the Bride'

Tales of Beatrix Potter

Tales of Beatrix Potter (MGM–EMI) is a ballet rather than a film. It is also Frederick Ashton rather than Beatrix Potter. Both these results were to be expected. Ashton, at sixty-plus, is still the top choreographer in this country and, maybe, in the world; but he is a man of the theatre, not the cinema, bound to think of dance in terms of stage, not of screen. It is, I suppose, imaginable that a very special director, in co-operation with him, might make a dance-film which was primarily cinematic; but Reginald Mills, who directed *The Tales*, is evidently not of that calibre. He has been Ashton's servant rather than his equal partner —still less the dominant partner that the director of a really cinematic dance-film would need to be. But, in an imperfect world, I do not think that this imbalance between choreographer and director, in the making of this particular film, is to be grumbled about. At any rate, to any Potter-lover who also happens to be an admirer of Ashton it seemed most happy and most right that he should be her interpreter. With his delicacy of touch, his positive delight in being old-fashioned and his skill as a miniaturist he seemed just the man to cope with the little creatures of the Potter nursery-landscape. It was of him, rather than of the film director, that we expected great things.

By that I do not mean that camera and cutting-room have contributed nothing to the merits of the film. The camera has given us, quite aptly, the requisite sense of smallness—the contrast between Mrs. Tittlemouse and the immensity of her natural surroundings; the screen has been able to present a whole gallery of exact copies of the Potter pictures; and every now and then a trick is pulled off (the eye of a real, menacing cat staring at the Two Bad Mice) which is pure cinema. But, by and large, Ashton has been so much the master and the director has been so much the servant that, to my mind, their work could be transferred from screen to stage with very little loss and, indeed, with some compensating gain—the chief gain being that it would seem more at home with itself.

But these *Tales*, I said, are not only a ballet rather than a film, they are also Ashton rather than Potter. The two points go together. What Ashton has aimed at is no exact reproduction of the nursery stories but a pretty free fantasia in which Squirrel Nutkin, Jemima Puddleduck, Jeremy Fisher and the rest of the diminutive menagerie are, indeed, highly recognisable but in which, too, their adventures are only raw material to be treated however best suits a choreographic fancy. So if we are given a ballet rather than a film we are also given a ballet rather than the Potter stories. It is only the Tale of Two Bad Mice which emerges quite intact; this is told almost straight, owes least

Frederick Ashton as Mrs Tiggy-Winkle

to choreography and, incidentally, is the most amusing episode in the film.

Ashton is a versatile choreographer, adaptable to various styles. But, first and foremost, he is a classicist; all his finest ballets have been in a dance idiom very closely derived from the academic tradition of, say, *Swan Lake* or *The Sleeping Beauty*, albeit with something added which is all his own. It is in this Ashtonesque neo-classical idiom that he prefers to work and it is in this idiom that he has made the Potter ballet. Within that idiom he has, once again, been charmingly inventive—with, for instance, a delicious 'Mouse Waltz', in which the tails of the mice become a kind of chain of ribbons, and a splendid virtuoso solo for Jeremy Fisher. And the young dancers of the Royal Ballet—he has used, mainly, the juniors rather than the seniors of the Company—perform his choreography, as they always do, at their very best. But there is one, big, foreseeable (though, I think, not entirely foreseen) flaw in the neat, well-constructed pattern. Ballet-dancing—any dancing, for that matter, but ballet more than any other Western kind—depends on 'line'; and 'line' is provided by the positions, gestures, movements of the dancer's whole body, including the head and neck. If you smother the dancer from the hips upwards in a heavy costume and mask, you play Old Harry with the dancer's 'line'. The masks, by Doboujinsky, are magnificent; so are the costumes, by Christine Edzard; and, between them, they re-create the Potter creatures, enchantingly. But the effect of the combination between the massive Potter-like super-structures and the twinkling Royal Ballet legs beneath them is only very briefly entertaining; very soon it becomes tedious. There is a place for such heavy disguises in classical ballet; but it is a small place, one of comic relief. To try to sustain a 90-minute classical ballet in such masks and drapery is to ask too much; the effect of the balletic line is lost and the end product is a bit of a bore. That is why, as I said earlier, the episode of the Two Bad Mice (their destructiveness in the dolls' house) comes off best; because it owes more to sheer, hilarious fun and least to classical choreography, its performers' 'line' does not matter.

So we get a ballet rather than a film, Ashton rather than Potter—and a typical, long Ashton ballet with a big, untypical flaw in it. If I do not grumble about getting a theatre-ballet, which happens to be on celluloid, rather than a genuine dance-film that is because I know how very rarely we can expect to get anything in the latter category; even now I can only think of *On the Town*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, the not very successful *Invitation to the Dance*—and nothing much besides. What might, however, be fair cause for grumbling is the music for *The Tales*, arranged by John Lanchbery from every imaginable, half-remembered, half-forgotten Victorian source; it, too, is essentially music for a theatre-ballet rather than for a dance-film (its punctuations are all theatrical rather than cinematic) and it is a rather meretricious, cumulatively monotonous specimen of its kind.

Of course, this film confirms that if you want to put the Potter stories on the screen, as distinct from producing a balletic evocation, a free fantasia on the Potter theme, then the only way to do it is by a cartoon film. Come to think of it, cartoon films are, all of them, examples of choreography (movement set to music or at least to sound). A cartoon Potter could give you the lot—the pictures, the stories, the dance. A final word: Frederick Ashton himself plays or dances Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle in the film and I rather think that, of all the characters, Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle comes off best—or maybe, equal best with the Bad Mice. Like all the rest she is an exact copy of the Potter original but, though she too dances, she does it very gently—in Tiggy-Winkle rather than balletic style.

JAMES MONAHAN

The Trumbo Letters

from page 157

rightly regarded his union membership and political affiliations as a personal matter, constitutionally protected, and no concern of any private or government agency.

In a quirky letter (drafted but perhaps not sent) to the FBI in 1944, he remarked that, 'I have been, at various times, described as a communist—a label which few conscientious Americans from the President down have managed to escape.' This is of course somewhat disingenuous. So too perhaps are the various contradictory statements about the political content of the movies on which he and his friends worked. In 1947 he challenged the editor of the *Hollywood Reporter* to go through his pictures and stated that, 'If these films contained any elements of communist propaganda, I cannot believe that you lack either the intelligence to detect them or the courage to denounce them.' On the other hand, the previous year he had lectured the editor of the Communist journal *Masses and Mainstream* on the difficulty of injecting 'progressive subject matter' into a mass medium like the movies, but cited half a dozen pictures containing elements of it, all but one of which were scripted, as he and the recipient knew, by Party members. In this same letter he talks about scriptwriters being 'purely industrial workers, subject to a great many of the economic ills of industrial workers in other industries.' Clearly he wanted to feel that way, felt impelled to identify himself with the oppressed proletariat, for he later goes on to say that in the revolutionary struggle the independent artist has no real role:

> 'It will be done by organised artists, striving individually and organisationally and politically in the closest possible relationship with the great masses of workers who represent the only decent, democratic, anti-fascist force in the world today. Through them, and as part of them, we shall be enabled to use art as a weapon for the future of mankind, rather than as an adornment for the vanity of aesthetes and poseurs.'

Ten years later, he writes to a trade unionist, who had failed to acknowledge receipt of a pamphlet, saying that the man's action 'goes even beyond the diseased anti-intellectualism so characteristic of professional trade union bureaucrats.'

Leaving aside the author's penchant for hyperbole and his delight in invective (whether it be directed against Arthur Schlesinger in *Saturday Review* or contained in a bizarre ten-page letter to an unsatisfactory Minnesota hotel manager), there is throughout the book a strange inconsistency that is not always endearing. Trumbo has refused over the years to dine on crow and humble pie, but in compensation has to an enviable degree been able to have his cake and eat it. For to round it out we find him writing to the editor of *The Nation* in 1959, outlining not one but thirty subjects for possible articles, and expressing the importance he attaches as a reader to discovering the private views and convictions of an author: 'I always try to find out everything I can about the writer in order to form a final judgment of both the man and his work.' As a parent, he takes the same approach to teachers. Naturally he appreciates the dangers inherent in this attitude and observes:

> 'Problem: to shape a society in which it is *safe* to let one's beliefs be known. But safety itself can be ignoble under certain conditions. If people will not dare till it's safe to dare, then I feel they will not dare until it's safe to let one's beliefs be known. Morality can be a damned delicate business, but I know if I had my life to live over again, hindsight tells me I should have risked no more by openly stating my political affiliation than I did by concealing it—and should have had considerably less explaining to do both for the public and myself. It's something to think about.'

Something to think about indeed, as one places the tempestuous graph of Trumbo's career against the even, largely uncontroversial line of his credits from *Kitty Foyle* (1940) through *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1945) and *Exodus* (1960) to the current multi-million dollar *The Horsemen*. ■

BOOK REVIEWS

HISTORY OF THE BRITISH FILM 1918-1929

By Rachael Low

ALLEN AND UNWIN, £7.35

Dr. Rachael Low is unique in her field and one turns easily to conventional phrases in writing of her work. 'A Standard Work', 'An Important Book', 'A Remarkable Job of Research', 'A Work of Great Authority'. It so happens that these comments are true, as the *History* is an archival book and *must* be acquired by all who are interested in films. There are not many people alive who were working in film production immediately after World War I; George Pearson, Ivor Montagu, Herbert Wilcox, Victor Saville, Walter Forde, Hitchcock are names that readily spring to mind. I hope there are many more, as it will be as fascinating an exercise for them as it was for me to turn the clock back half a century.

The *History* recalls the early 1920s when our campaign for desperately needed government assistance was sponsored by the Federation of British Industries. It was Charles Tennyson (later Sir Charles), father of my colleague Pen Tennyson (unhappily killed on active service), who, as Deputy Director of the Federation, conducted the campaign to a successful conclusion resulting in the passing of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927). The Act of Parliament with only modest variations has remained on the Statute Book for over forty years.

The chapter on censorship is in particular a document of significant social importance, bringing into sharp focus changes in attitudes and patterns of behaviour that have taken place since the end of the First World War. References to the activities of Sir William Joynson-Hicks (later Lord Brentford) were frequent during the controversy on stage censorship, but I had forgotten the influences he brought to bear on the censorship of films. Surprising too to hear that Sir Austen Chamberlain attempted to impede *Dawn*, the story of Nurse Cavell, because he did not want to hurt the feelings of our ex-enemies. Rachael Low relates accurately the story of the 1920s when British financial interests were aiding and abetting the importation of 800 foreign films (mainly American) with little regard, if any, for native production. These films were handled by upwards of 60 distribution companies in a sellers' market in which, alas, there was little place for British films. Rachael Low should be persuaded to proceed forthwith with other volumes until she approaches the 1970s; and as she does, she will no doubt relate, with her usual clarity, the modifications in the structure of the industry in the years since 1929 which have resulted in the two vast vertically integrated companies and not much else.

I am sorry that no mention is made of my old colleague and one-time chief, Mark Ostrer. He was next in seniority to Isadore Ostrer and had a large share in the formation of Gaumont British Picture Corporation and was thereafter very much concerned with its operations and those of its subsidiary companies.

The *History* gives a good account of the reorganisation of the industry in 1929. Finance for the production of British films was provided (substantially invested in silent films, disastrous losses soon arose as the advent of sound films made all others largely obsolete). The analysis in depth by Rachael Low reinforces my personal opinion that the problem of recurring crises throughout the years could, to some extent, be traced to the fact that the companies formed in 1928 were not of organic growth, but were hastily and haphazardly organised groups of exhibitor and distributor interests with profit records required for the purpose of company flotation. Reference is made to the supposed guaranteed outlet for British films; I can confirm that this was a relative myth. For example, a few years later *The Man Who Knew Too Much* was at first rejected by the circuit with which we were associated and only after immense pressure were we given a relatively small fixed price booking; it was not considered worth a percentage booking.

It is intriguing to read on page 105 words long since forgotten which I used forty years ago. 'Most of the money, incidentally, was raised for distributing and exhibiting companies who never failed to quote on their prospectuses the British films they had distributed or exhibited. These were *their* films, as ever—*their* achievement, perpetuating the domination of the primary producer by other trade interest.' *Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose.*

Rachael Low not only provides details of the work of the more important producers and directors in the early 1920s: Hepworth, George Pearson, Wilcox, G.B. Samuelson, Bruce Woolfe, Henry Edwards, Victor Saville, Adrian Brunel, all were well known to me and she writes of them often with sympathy and with a remarkable insight into their characters. She has assessed our limitations too.

The book is quite properly severely critical at times of the films made during the period. Such phrases recur as 'Tasteless and unsophisticated', 'Made with a complete contempt for the audience', 'Essentially old-fashioned', 'Lacking in personality', 'They were slow and heavy', 'The acted sequences were somewhat stagey and interpretation of events uncritically patriotic. . .' There is much justification for these comments, as many of the films we made were thoroughly bad. There was the continuing struggle for money to make films, and it was often acquired by people with a facility for raising cash but with little or no knowledge of film production—then, as now, the inevitable disasters occurred. A paragraph on page 153 is worth quoting: 'At the very lowest level of film-making there was no shortage of enthusiasm, although talent, imagination, luck and even common sense might be lacking. Individuals seeking capital, ingeniously making some modest film in the hope of impressing potential backers for the next one, forming or just talking about forming one small company after another and frequently going bankrupt themselves in the process, all these formed a small army of depressingly familiar names which acquired a professional ring simply through having been around so long.' That statement has a contemporary ring about it.

There are comments in the book (some of them concerning matters with which I was closely identified) with which I disagree, but in the main it is in points of emphasis rather than mistakes of detail. It would be wrong of me to cavil or suggest my interpretation of events is the more correct. There are, however, some points of detail which should be put right for the record: for example, *Paddy-the-Next-Best-Thing* was made by Cutts and Wilcox (Graham-Wilcox) and not Gainsborough or Piccadilly Films. There are other minor mistakes too.

The two Chapters IV and V, 'Producers in the Early Twenties' and 'Producers in the Later Twenties' have a peculiar fascination. With hindsight it is possible to trace the beginnings of the vast corporations that now bestride our industry. The early history of British International Pictures Ltd., and Gaumont British Picture Corporation (ten years at least before the industry had heard of J. Arthur Rank), is compulsive reading albeit a little complicated for the uninitiated: at least it must be said that the larger corporations appeared for a time to get some order out of financial chaos. As to the rest, by and large it was a pretty sad story, and it is no wonder that for many years film production was looked upon with some suspicion by the City of London: it remains to this day a 'high risk' venture.

As to 'Techniques of Film Production—The Studios', there is I think some confusion as to the Gaumont Studios, Lime Grove. These studios were rebuilt in 1930/31 (without adequate consultation with the creative and technical personnel called upon to work in them), and then controlled by Gaumont British Picture Corporation Ltd. There was no Gaumont Company production as such after that date. The first film under my control was *Rome Express* (1932).

Walter Rilla, Jane Novak in 'Blackguard', produced by Michael Balcon in 1925. Graham Cutts directed, with Hitchcock as assistant.

Gainsborough Pictures (1928) Ltd. was a separate public company and its production activities were continued at Islington. The confusion arises, I think, from the fact that I was at that time Managing Director of Gainsborough as well as Director of Production for Gaumont British Picture Corporation.

The 1920s were not entirely an artistic wasteland. Apart from men of the calibre of Cecil Hepworth, George Pearson, Bruce Woolfe, Victor Saville, Alfred Hitchcock, Ivor Montagu and Anthony Asquith, Rachael Low reminds us that in 1927 the Empire Marketing Board film unit was established under John Grierson. Until it was done to death as the Crown Film Unit in 1952, it was, by common consent, the greatest single influence in British film production.

The History of the British Film 1918-1929 will be welcomed by all who care about films, but perhaps it means something more to those of the silent film era than it does to the vast majority of film-makers who have only worked in the sound film medium. It is a considerable experience to see the most important years of a working life through the eyes of an intelligent neutral observer. As I write, there wafts the smell of roasting coffee beans from the Legrain coffee shop in Soho, forty years after, where Adrian Brunel, Ivor Montagu, Henry Harris, Miles Mander, Hitchcock and others of us foregathered daily to discuss the prospects of work and the films we hoped to make one day. There are moments of sadness too in the realisation that in the process of time, the survivors of the period 1918-1929 are all too few. Many of the film-makers of the 1920s were men with a passionate belief in their craft, and Rachael Low's book, amongst other things, is in its way a tribute to those who made efforts to establish a firmly based native film production industry—alas without much success.

I am afraid I appear egotistical in this review. It is unintentional, but try as I will I am unable to dissociate myself from the events of 1918-1929. It would be idle to pretend that I was not concerned with the drama of the period, if only in a supporting role.

MICHAEL BALCON

UNDERGROUND FILM: A Critical History
By Parker Tyler
SECKER AND WARBURG, £2.75

SEX PSYCHE ETCETERA IN THE FILM
By Parker Tyler
PENGUIN BOOKS, 35p

It is vouchsafed to few critics, mercifully, to influence the thought or technique of creators. But for Parker Tyler has been reserved the singular fate of actually being immortalised between the covers of a novel: recent American reprints of his early books proudly inform us that he is, after all, Myra Breckinridge's favourite critic. Nor, be it said, is the accolade altogether undeserved; through the mouth and in the teachings of Myra, Gore Vidal offers a very fair summary of what *Magic and Myth of the Movies* is all about. As Myra observes with understandable enthusiasm: 'Tyler's vision (films are the unconscious expressions of age-old human myths) is perhaps the only important critical insight this century has produced. Also, Tyler's close scrutiny of the films of the Forties makes him our age's central thinker, if only because *in the decade between 1935 and 1945, no irrelevant film was made in the United States.* During those years, the entire range of human (which is to say, American) legend was put on film, and any profound study of those extraordinary works is bound to make crystal-clear the human condition.'

Whether or not Tyler would have put it quite so categorically, studying those extraordinary works profoundly from this point of view was precisely the task he set himself. With results sometimes absurd and sometimes weirdly illuminating. Rarely in those days did he set up as a film critic pure and simple (supposing that a film critic should be either): aesthetic judgment of the films was manifestly beside his point, which was to use films as the raw material for a vaguely Jungian exploration of the human psyche. In this he incidentally prefigures and provides some sort of intellectual justification for the camp-nostalgic approach to classic Hollywood which has become inescapable in certain quarters of late. If one feels worried about whether it is possible to have a serious regard for Maria Montez and all her works, it is no doubt comforting to be shown just how she can be classified as a mythic archetype. And perhaps this unsought-for role as fairy-godmother of camp criticism is not after all so displeasing to a critic who, with a hefty biography of Tchelitchew under his belt, is now engaged, we are told, on an authoritative study of *Homosexuality in the Movies.*

But Parker Tyler, no mere stripling when *Magic and Myth of the Movies* appeared in 1947 (he was already forty), has continued to progress ever since, despite his disciples. There is some camp but a lot of sound sense in *Sex Psyche Etcetera in the Film*, a collection of miscellaneous pieces which came out in the States a couple of years ago and now first sees light of day here, enterprisingly enough, as a Penguin. In the first essay we find him vigorously reacting to Warhol's *Fuck*, which he regards, very properly, as not at all blue and therefore very exciting to the intelligence: it doesn't represent, it *is*. Next he is off on a saddened consideration of the decline of the sex goddess in films, who is not meant to be slept with, but slept about. His study of the horse as a 'totem animal of male power' is actually subtitled 'An Essay in the Straight-camp Style', though whether he means by that to indicate that he intends self-parody is not apparent. Elsewhere in the book he is very solemn about *Persona* and *Blow-Up* in the light (fitful at best) of Kracauer and Suzanne Langer, and cuts Welles down to size as a 'big experimental cult hero' and 'unevenly gifted "little master".' You don't have to agree, but you do have to keep reading.

Underground Film is quite another matter. In it Tyler delivers exactly what his subtitle promises, a critical history tracing the origins of present underground styles and attitudes back to Dada, Surrealism, Expressionism and the abstract experimental cinema of the 1920s. This is not, as it well might be, a big put-down; instead, Tyler's wide-ranging culture and vast storehouse of sometimes eccentric film knowledge enables him over and over again to come to films of the new underground with sensible enthusiasm, not unduly overawed by the wilder claims made on their behalf or by their sometimes factitious air of novelty.

The result is a surprising amount of sound and often illuminating criticism: you feel that Tyler can retain his sense of proportion about underground cinema because he has been there before and already produced a sort of programme for the way it is now going. But at the same time he shows an endearing willingness to see that the criteria he applies will seem to most of those directly involved quite irrelevant, and indeed may well actually be irrelevant. He claims no more than to 'relate the medium and style of film to traditional forms such as epic, myth and lyric,' (incidentally, is myth a form?) 'as well as to the novel . . . in order to be culturally and critically intelligible.' Fair enough. And if his whole book is finally irradiated by his vision of 'the central value of the poetic imagination, which in film is historically in the keeping of the international avant-garde,' that is fair enough too. There is no reason why critics as well as creators should not have their dreams—particularly if the dreams help them to arrive at a more coherent picture of reality, even the rather special realities of the dream factory.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

BOOKS RECEIVED

THE CINEMA OF CARL DREYER. By Tom Milne. (Zwemmer, 75p)

A DISCOVERY OF CINEMA. By Thorold Dickinson. (Oxford University Press, £3.00)

THE FILM DIRECTOR AS SUPERSTAR. By Joseph Gelmis. (Secker & Warburg, £2.75)

FIVE SCREENPLAYS. By Harold Pinter. (Methuen, £3.75)

THE GERMAN CINEMA. By Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel. (Dent, £3.00)

GOTTA SING GOTTA DANCE. By John Kobal. (Hamlyn, £1.75)

A MIRROR FOR ENGLAND. By Raymond Durgnat. (Faber & Faber, £3.00)

THE REAL TINSEL. By Bernard Rosenberg and Harry Silverstein. (Collier-Macmillan, £3.75)

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Letters

The Conformist

SIR,—Film historians have had a notoriously difficult time writing about silent films—as witness the famous Pudovkin–Lindgren controversy where it turned out that Pudovkin and Lindgren were writing about different versions of *Mother*. Now it seems that the same problem is arising with more recent films. In the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND my article 'Fathers and Sons' included a lengthy analysis of Bertolucci's *The Conformist*; this was based on the print I saw first at the Berlin Festival and then twice later in New York. The first indication that something was up came from Bertolucci himself, who said in November that he preferred the French-dubbed version because Trintignant used his own voice, and because he had made a few slight changes to the film. It turns out that these 'few slight changes' were made not only to the French version, but also to the one being shown in Italy, and maybe the one showing commercially in New York.

The differences, in any case, are the following: Bertolucci has cut much of Italo's part, so that the importance of his role is much diminished. The scene in which Italo claimed never to be mistaken in detecting normality or its opposite while the camera slyly showed us he had on shoes of different colours is gone, as is the whole of the blind people's ball.

The final scene has been cut, too. We no longer see the Colosseum squatter stripping down for the night, with Marcello watching fascinated. The boy suddenly is seen bedded down, and we catch only a glimpse of Marcello. In all, about six minutes have gone; the film may have gained in tightness, but one can't help regretting the loss of these two scenes.

Finally, I made a slip myself; it is only Anna that Manganiello kills. Quadri is actually disposed of by the mysterious accomplices who suddenly pop up on the road to Savoy.

Yours faithfully,

RICHARD ROUD

London, W.1.

Zoom Lens

SIR,—I was most interested to read Stein Falchenberg's answer (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1971) to my article 'The Aesthetics of the Zoom Lens', but he seems to have misunderstood the main points of my argument.

In describing zoom and telephoto lenses as the mobile and static halves of the same process I may have been less than clear. What I intended to emphasise was that both deny the third dimension; the telephoto lens *statically* by flattening the photographed object, the zoom lens in *movement* by appearing to move through space, either forwards or backwards, while not in fact doing so.

Stein Falchenberg's statement that the quality of the final frame in a zoom can be achieved by masking off of the initial image seems to me irrelevant. He himself admits that the depth of field is reduced; this automatically tends to create an effect of planarity, as does the increased graininess of the final image. Apart from this, when a distant object is photographed through a telephoto lens it is enlarged only in two dimensions; the foreshortening is the same as if we were seeing it at a long distance. Thus an object 1,000 yards away photographed so that it appears 100 yards away will not have the same depth, and consequently volume, to the eye that it would have if it really were 100 yards away. Thus the image is flattened. He is also mistaken in equating the eye with a zoom. What the eye does when focusing on an object is a combination of a focus pull and an iris in, but much faster and more sensitive than either. The object is *not* enlarged in relation to the total frame of vision, which *is* the effect of the zoom lens. One could certainly argue that a fast zoom-in is a psychological equivalent of some subjective reactions (e.g. surprise), but it is no more genuinely so than a cut to a close-up would be. Whichever the director chooses to use should depend on the stylistic context. And, incidentally, a piece of autobiographical information, 'attributes' came first and 'consequences' followed, not the other way around as Stein Falchenberg suggests.

As far as his last point goes, his equation of the long-distance close-up with alienation, lack of involvement, bourgeois art and freedom from social commitment seems to me fatuous. Social commitment is not the property of a certain type of lens nor is it denied to others. It is possible to be formalist and 'socially committed', neo-realist and 'bourgeois', and vice versa. There are no prescriptions.

Yours faithfully,

Paris 15e. PAUL JOANNIDES

Death in Venice

SIR,—In his recent article 'The Aesthetics of the Zoom Lens' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1970/71) Paul Joannides criticises Visconti for his use of the zoom and telephoto in *The Damned* on the grounds that it ruined 'the astonishing sensual immediacy he was able to create with a conventionally moving camera, while at the same time not offering any compensatory advantages.'

While accepting the validity of this point, and to a large extent the main thesis of Joannides' article, I wonder how far he would be inclined to extend the criticism

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Arthur Calder-Marshall described the first volume of this history as *'an essential work for the film student'*. ***Ernest Lindgren*** said it was *'indispensable'*, and ***Kinematograph Weekly*** described it as a *'must for all serious film people'*.

480 pages Illustrated throughout £7.35

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to Visconti's more recent film *Death in Venice*. In this film also there is an extensive use of the zoom and telephoto, which together with the emphasis on period detail serves to make the two films very similar stylistically. But in his emphasis on the 'planarising' effects of zoom and telephoto Joannides perhaps runs the risk of ignoring the dramatic consequences of their use.

In *Death in Venice* the nature of the theme makes the use of the distancing and alienating effects of these techniques quite legitimate, and sufficient compensation for any advantages of conventional shooting styles which might be lost as a consequence. By using telephoto shots almost exclusively for close views of the guests at the Hotel des Bains, particularly of course of Tadzio, Visconti identifies our view closely with that of Aschenbach. The psychological effects of zoom and telephoto must be to produce in the audience an attitude similar to that produced by Mann in the original narrative, by mixing description of the physical environment with description of Aschenbach's emotional response to it; the film's whole emphasis is on Aschenbach's response.

It is difficult to see how this result could have been achieved so successfully without the use of zoom and telephoto. Whatever may be the visual disadvantages of *The Damned*, in his later film Visconti has fully realised the *dramatic* potential of zoom and telephoto.

Yours faithfully,

ROGER T. HINTON

Bangor, Caerns.

2001

SIR,—I really should not take the time to write this kind of letter, and I am sure that it could be better written, but I do believe that SIGHT AND SOUND readers of Don Daniels' interesting 'A Skeleton Key to 2001' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1970/71), which included a put-down of my book *The Making of Kubrick's 2001*, should know that Daniels had submitted an article for publication in the book and that the article was rejected by the editor. Daniels was eager to be represented in 'so much nonsense'.

There was much comment about my book here in the States, including Kubrick's 'an extraordinary achievement' and Clarke's 'there are things in the book that even I didn't know,' and *Saturday Review's* 'an exuberant and delightful book; like the movie itself, the book pulses with triumph,' and Joseph Gelmis' 'presents an immense amount of information about the way the film was made . . . what emerges is a sense of the enormity of Kubrick's and Clarke's genius and stamina,' and Crawdaddy's 'a brilliant companion to the movie.'

In the autumn, SIGHT AND SOUND readers should pick up Clarke's new book, *The Lost Worlds of 2001*, which includes much material that Kubrick and Clarke considered for at least the novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and discarded. One notion for novel and film: a parade down New York's Fifth Avenue of 17 monoliths riding in the back seats of open convertibles. (If Kubrick had only made *that* movie!) Anyway, genius dominated the entire project, as Clarke once again reveals.

Yours faithfully,

JEROME AGEL

New York.

SIR,—Don Daniels' interesting analysis of the themes of *2001* still leaves unexplained—in fact, highlights—what seems to me a basic ambiguity in the film's attitude. How can Kubrick, as I agree he does, condemn the contrast between sophisticated machinery and primitive emotionality ('beneath the satellite remains the bone of mankind's primitive emotional-moral equipment', etc.) and at the same time assert the value of 'non-rational modes of knowledge'? Does Kubrick hope for more subtle modes, perhaps? Subtle or not, though, won't the 'non-rational' be as dangerous in 2001 as it is now?

Yours faithfully,

JOHN OWEN

Liverpool.

Georg af Klercker

SIR,—In my review of Peter Cowie's books *Sweden 1 and 2* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1971) I referred to his mention of the hitherto little known director Georg af Klercker. Your readers may like to know that three of his films, restored by the restoration department of the Swedish Film Institute, were shown at the Film Week held in Gothenburg (where af Klercker made most of his films) March 1st-7th, 1971. Among them was *The Mystery of the Night of the 25th*, which Peter Cowie mentions as showing the influence of Feuillade, and which was apparently subjected to some censorship troubles in its time.

Yours faithfully,

NEVILLE HUNNINGS

Purley, Surrey.

It's Still All True

SIR,—I shall comment briefly on Gavin Millar's review of my book on Orson Welles (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1970/71) and Richard Wilson's further comment on *It's All True*. Mr. Millar's review is worth only one remark: if he does not know that von Sternberg developed the slowest dissolves in the history of the screen, and used them with more artistic effect, then he has no business to be reviewing books of scholarship. Richard Wilson objects yet again to my statement that Welles ruined *My Friend Bonito* by withdrawing its director and failing to complete it, suggesting that I have based my statement on that of 'an aggrieved third party'. My statement is based on the separate and unprompted evidence of *all* those living and available who were connected with the film in question: its director, Norman Foster, its cinematographers, Alex Phillips and Floyd Crosby, its assistant cameraman, Harold Wellman, and assistants to Welles who have preferred to remain nameless.

Yours faithfully,

CHARLES HIGHAM

Los Angeles.

Sight and Sound

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

20th CENTURY-FOX for *Little Big Man, Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime, Black Flowers for the Bride, Walkabout.*
MGM/EMI for *The Go-Between, Tales of Beatrix Potter.*
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CESKOSLOVENSKY FILM for *Genius, 322.*
LONDON FILM SCHOOL for *Come Dancing, Aves Room.*
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FRANCIS LACASSIN for photographs of Alice Guy Blaché, *La Vie du Christ.*
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****ALL THE RIGHT NOISES** (*Fox*)
Nicely muted love triangle, surprisingly shelved for two years. A familiar theme—backstage romance between teenage chorus girl and married stage technician—gets by on Gerry O'Hara's knowing direction, a good ear for dialogue, and a delightful performance from Judy Carne as the wife in the middle. (Tom Bell, Olivia Hussey.)

****BLACK FLOWERS FOR THE BRIDE** (*Fox*)
Subtitled 'A Comedy of Evil'—a more accurate description of this distant cousin to *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, about a young man who climbs a ladder of corpses to possess a castle. But the atmosphere, bland, tender and eccentrically funny, is all its own. (Angela Lansbury, Michael York; director, Harold Prince.) *Reviewed.*

*****BLOODY MAMA** (*MGM-EMI*)
Sensually photographed by John Alonzo, Roger Corman's compelling and uneasily comic tale of Ma Barker and her boys eschews the glamour of Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* and dwells instead on the outlaws' twilight passions—incest, sodomy, addiction, masochism: a destruction from within that leads inexorably to their brutal elimination at the vengeful hands of the society without. (Shelley Winters, Don Stroud, Bruce Dern.)

***BLUSHING CHARLIE** (*Miracle*)
Characteristic Vilgot Sjöman mixture of sex and politics. The budding relationship between workman Charlie and the homeless, pregnant girl foisted on him is quietly and quaintly done; but his political awakening (complete with joyous slow motion) is a bit much. (Bernt Lundquist, Solveig Ternström.)

***BREWSTER McCLOUD** (*MGM-EMI*)
Another black comedy from the director of M*A*S*H, vaguely concerned with a youth's attempts to fly above the human condition, and so strong on throwaway material that it leaves nothing substantial to hold on to. But within all the wilfully offbeat fragments there are some marvellous characterisations, and the Texas Astrodome setting lends a certain credibility to the hero's desire for flight. (Bud Cort, Sally Kellerman, Michael Murphy; director, Robert Altman.)

BRIDE OF THE ANDES (*Contemporary*)
Disappointingly slight piece of anthropological observation from Susumu Hani, about a Japanese mail-order bride who finds life has its problems with an archaeologist husband in Peru. Fascinating documentary detail smothered in a trite romantic fiction. (Sachiko Hidari, Koji Takahashi.)

B.S.I LOVE YOU (*Fox*)
The rise and rise of a womanising television commercials director, weighed down with an excess of technical gimmickry. Intermittently funny but generally vapid debut by Steven Hillard Stern, who picked up the tricks as a commercials director. . . (Peter Kastner, Joanna Cameron.)

***CIAO, FEDERICO!** (*Connoisseur*)
Gideon Bachmann's close-up view of Fellini at work on *Satyricon*. The maestro emerges as expected—petulant, ebullient, self-engrossed, and quite aware that no one else's documentary can touch his definitive self-analysis in *8½*.

CONNECTING ROOMS (*London Screen*)
Bette Davis in Bayswater bedsitter territory, and her most sympathetic performance in years as a musician who befriends Michael Redgrave, the down-at-heel schoolteacher in the next room. Otherwise an old-fashioned piece of schmaltz, camped up, laced with pop, and laid on rather thick. (Director, Franklin Gollings.)

****COTTON COMES TO HARLEM** (*United Artists*)
Very funny, lively adaptation of the Chester Himes novel about murder and Machiavellian mayhem in Harlem. A welcome relief from Black Power and Black Saints, but unfortunately the storytelling is so confused that it drags. (Raymond St. Jacques, Godfrey Cambridge; director, Ossie Davis.)

****DEATH OCCURRED LAST NIGHT** (*Eagle*)
Offbeat Italian thriller (dubbed, but not destructively so) about a police hunt for a missing girl—25, luscious, nymphomaniac, but with the mind of a child of three—believed to be catering for 'specialised tastes' as a call girl. Odd, obsessive atmosphere of universal doom and despair. (Raf Vallone, Frank Wolff; director, Duccio Tessari.)

ELVIS—THAT'S THE WAY IT IS (*MGM-EMI*)
Elvis Presley in concert, not so closely observed by Denis Sanders. A feast of songs for the fans and some extraordinary insights into the Messianic appeal of popular success; behind the scenes, though, he's nothing but a man and isn't giving anything away.

*****FIVE EASY PIECES** (*Columbia*)
Following a misplaced American from his work on the Texas oil rigs back to the bosom of his high-brow family in Washington State, Bob Rafelson's first feature paints a memorably bleak portrait of Middle America's cultural waste-land. Though linked by a splendid, unassuming performance from Jack Nicholson, the two sections of the narrative remain obstinately separate, but separately fascinating. (Karen Black, Susan Anspach.)

*****GENOU DE CLAIRE, LE** (*Gala*)
The latest of Rohmer's moral tales, and another exquisitely elegant, witty and articulate study of the shortcomings of a virtuous man (this time Jean-Claude Brialy behind an unfamiliar beard), poised between lucidity and bad faith, between an absent fiancée and a trio of beautiful alternatives. (Aurora Cornu, Béatrice Romand, Laurence de Monaghan.) *Reviewed.*

***ICE** (*The Other Cinema*)
Robert Kramer's interesting though variable, and variably convincing, look at urban revolution in the not too distant American future. A nightmarish view of the fantasy and reality of radical politics in a head-on confrontation with the State machine. (Robert Kramer, Tom Griffin.) *Reviewed.*

****I NEVER SANG FOR MY FATHER** (*Warner Bros.*)
Acting field day (everybody good but Melvyn Douglas superb) in a careful, beautifully unsentimental adaptation of Robert Anderson's O'Neill-ish play about a middle-aged son's despairing struggle to love his lonely, self-centred father. Marred, but not sabotaged, by attempts at 'opening out'. (Gene Hackman, Estelle Parsons, Dorothy Stickney; director, Gilbert Cates.)

****INVESTIGATION OF A CITIZEN ABOVE SUSPICION** (*Columbia*)
Odd but intriguing blend of police thriller and political parable, about a fanatical police chief who commits murder to demonstrate his own inviolability before the law. Elio Petri's direction matches style to subject, to disconcertingly flamboyant effect. (Gian Maria Volonté, Florinda Bolkan.) *Reviewed.*

***I WALK THE LINE** (*Columbia*)
Frankenheimer's drama of love's labour lost in a small Kentucky town, with Gregory Peck's ageing sheriff in brooding pursuit of nymphet Tuesday Weld to escape his sterile marriage. External details have a death-bound fascination, but script and direction don't add much to Johnny Cash's lyrics. (Estelle Parsons, Ralph Meeker.) *Reviewed.*

JA, JA, MEIN GENERAL! BUT WHICH WAY TO THE FRONT? (*Warner Bros.*)
Jerry Lewis off form again as a millionaire army reject who forms his own private militia and wreaks havoc among the Germans in Italy by masquerading as enemy top brass. Repetitive and mostly unfunny. (Jan Murray, John Wood; director, Jerry Lewis.)

*****JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME** (*Fox*)
A further experiment in time from Alain Resnais, as a man enters a pumpkin time-machine to conjure up a fleeting remembrance of things past, things forgotten and things imagined. Edited with crystalline precision to make a film as teasingly fascinating as *Marienbad*. (Claude Rich.) *Reviewed.*

***JOE** (*British Lion*)
In a confrontation with drugs and the beautiful people, the American radical right loses its head in a cautionary tale of paranoia and parricide. Extreme, trendy and exploitative allegory, but interesting nonetheless. (Peter Boyle, Dennis Patrick; director, John G. Avildsen.)

***LAST VALLEY, THE** (*Cinerama*)
From his unusually literate script, director James Clavell weaves an epic tapestry of war and witchcraft in seventeenth-century Europe as background to the battle of ideas between a pragmatic professional soldier (Michael Caine in his first thinking role) and a cautious humanist (Omar Sharif) who find temporary if over-symbolic respite in a secluded valley.

LOVE STORY (*Paramount*)
Schmaltz and snobbery professionally blended to keep the hankies damp as the Catholic bride of the millionaire Protestant scion bravely dies of leukemia while babbling about Mozart. (Ali MacGraw, Ryan O'Neal; director, Arthur Hiller.)

PEOPLE NEXT DOOR, THE (*Avco-Embassy*)
The generation gap widens still further as a teenage daughter experiments with drugs and ends up in a sanatorium. It works up a marvellous lather, but is too steeped in melodrama to convince as anything else. (Eli Wallach, Julie Harris, Deborah Winters; director David Greene.)

PORTRAITS OF WOMEN (*Target International*)
Jörn Donner treads a perilously thin line between pornography and self-satire (and occasionally crosses it) in his flamboyant portrait of a Scandinavian film director (played by Jörn Donner) and the cluster of eager ladies with whom he unflinchingly shares his bed and boredom. (Ritva Vespä.)

*****QUEIMADA!** (*United Artists*)
Pontecorvo's fascinating lesson in 19th century history, with Marlon Brando switching roles from *agent provocateur* to counter-revolutionary as perfidious Albion foments and suppresses a Caribbean revolt. Political analysis intriguingly assimilated within an epic format. (Evaristo Marquez.) *Reviewed.*

QUIET PLACE IN THE COUNTRY, A (*United Artists*)
Weird mixture of eroticism, ghost story and surrealist fantasy, about a painter who flees the city to escape from incipient paranoia and meets it in the country when he's haunted by a poltergeist. Overwrought direction from Elio Petri hardly makes for clarity, let alone sanity. (Franco Nero, Vanessa Redgrave.)

****RITE, THE** (*Darvill*)
Faultless acting and relentless close-ups (it was made for television) characterise Bergman's tersest parable about the duality of the artist's role. Goaded by the prurient probings of an appeal court judge into their squalid lives, a small theatrical troupe charm him to death with the magic of their performance. (Gunnar Björnstrand, Ingrid Thulin, Anders Ek.) *Reviewed.*

*****SAMURAI, THE** (*Scotia-Barber*)
The four stars refer to Jean-Pierre Melville's superb *Le Samourai* (see *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1969/70, p. 14). The version being shown in Britain is not only dubbed, but duped to a pale shadow of itself, and hideously cut. Two major sequences have vanished (making nonsense of the film) as well as assorted bits and pieces. Be warned. (Alain Delon, Nathalie Delon, François Périer.)

****SUMMER OF '42** (*Warner Bros.*)
Youth's anxious efforts to shed its innocence, this time on an idyllic New England island in 1942. Precisely directed by Robert Mulligan with the help of a quietly observant screenplay and fine performances from three unknowns. (Jennifer O'Neill, Gary Grimes, Jerry Houser.) *Reviewed.*

****SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY** (*United Artists*)
Mellow and moving study by John Schlesinger, not so much of the tensions within a bisexual triangle as of the compromises that all relationships eventually impose. In keeping with the subject, the treatment is unusually restrained and well matched by Billy Williams' muted colour photography. (Glenda Jackson, Peter Finch, Murray Head). *Reviewed.*

VALERIE AND HER WEEK OF WONDERS (*Contemporary*)
Czech fairytale, ostensibly about the sexual awakening of a pubescent girl during her encounters with sundry weird and wonderful characters, though there's a remote political allegory hidden among the convoluted layers of reality and appearance. Marvellous colour photography, but too insubstantial even for a dream. (Jaroslava Schallerova; director, Jaromil Jires.)

VILLAIN (*MGM-EMI*)
Utterly grotesque tale of London's underworld, with Richard Burton queening it as a thug with a mother-fixation, sadistic joys, and homosexual passions. Cliché after cliché after cliché, with (Ian McShane excepted) performances to match. (Nigel Davenport, Donald Sinden, T. P. McKenna; director, Michael Tuchner.)

WUTHERING HEIGHTS (*MGM-EMI*)
Mean-spirited and, despite the location shooting, rather mangy-looking stab at Emily Brontë, who does not survive. It misses the point and atmosphere so thoroughly that one longs for the lush Wyler romance, or better still, the spiky insolence of Buñuel's *Cumbras Borrascosas*. (Anna Calder-Marshall, Timothy Dalton, Julian Glover; director, Robert Fuest.)

ZACHARIAH (*Cinerama*)
The first 'electric Western', with rock music and Biblical parable awkwardly jostling against a background of familiar Western mythology. The musicians make passable actors, but the few interesting ideas are buried under an avalanche of stylistic tricks and pretentious symbolism. (John Rubinstein, Don Johnson, Pat Quinn; director, George Englund.)

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